

# **RESPONSIBILITY IN THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE (GEN 37–50)**

By

ESAIE DE-S IA LAWMAN MOURNA

Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for  
the degree of

MASTER OF THEOLOGY

in the subject

OLD TESTAMENT

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

SUPERVISOR: PROF I J J SPANGENBERG

NOVEMBER 2008

[i]

“I declare that RESPONSIBILITY IN THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE (GEN 37-50) is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references”

.....

E D LAWMAN MOURNA

2008/11/12

## **RESPONSIBILITY IN THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE (GN 37-50)**

By E D LAWMAN MOURNA

MTh (Old Testament)

Supervisor: Prof I J J SPANGENBERG

### **SUMMARY**

The Joseph narrative (Gn 37-50) has fascinated scholars since the discovery of sources in the Pentateuch. However, it was Gerhard von Rad (1901-1971) who opened scholars' eyes to the wisdom current in the narrative. In recent years, narrative criticism became an important exegetical tool to analyze biblical stories. The dissertation makes use of the "quinary scheme" which narrative critics identified in some story plots since this scheme fits the plot of the Joseph narrative like a glove. There is an "initial situation", a "complication", a "transforming action", a "denouement" and a "final situation". However, the dissertation also takes the Israelite understanding of wisdom into account in assessing whether the different characters acted in a responsible or irresponsible way. Each of the sections of the plot is scrutinized to see how the different characters behave and to judge whether that behaviour can be classified as responsible in a wisdom sense.

#### **Key terms:**

Joseph narrative

Narrative criticism

Quinary scheme

Israelite wisdom

Wisdom ideology

Responsibility

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

This study, which is a cause for great rejoicing, could not have been fulfilled without the support of others. This is an opportunity for me to acknowledge my gratitude towards those who contributed to the completion of this study. Firstly, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to the University of South Africa (UNISA) my beloved university for opening up the way to learning for me, in order to discover its wealth.

I also owe a great debt to Prof Izak J J Spangenberg, who was not only a supervisor, but also a guide, father and pastor. His tireless enthusiasm, encouragement, patience, and untiring guidance directed my studies with much wisdom and discernment. I appreciate his keen perception and his kind manner of correction.

“Thank you” seems inadequate to express my gratitude to Prof Madipoane Masenya, Chair of the Department of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies for her powerful advice and encouragement.

Gratitude is also due to all the staff in the Department of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern Studies for their part in arranging various seminars and conferences. During these events, I learnt a lot and was very encouraged by their support and sharing of knowledge.

I am indebted to the Newtown Community Church (NCC) in Australia for its generous financial support through the wise father and councilor, Alan Wheeler (as well as Lorraine). The first part of this study has been successful because of their tireless support.

I also owe thanks to the Overseas Council International (OCI) for its financial contribution in my study through Ecole Supérieure de Théologie Évangélique – Shalom “ESTES” (Shalom Evangelical School of Theology “SEST”).

I would like to thank the International Church of Pretoria for its prayers and contribution by

giving me the opportunity to practice in the ministry.

Recognition is also due to the Assemblies Chretiennes au Tchad “ACT” (Christian Assemblies in Chad), and Ecole Superieure de Theologie Evangelique “ESTES” (Shalom Evangelical School of Theology “SEST”) where I respectively served as General Secretary of National Committee and lecturer at SEST. Your moral, social and spiritual support has been considerable.

Indebtedness is also due to:

- Prof Gert Prinsloo, together with his assistants Prof Jo- Mari Schader, Prof Lourens Grobbelaar from the College of Human Sciences, for enabling me to learn Hebrew at University of Pretoria.
- Alexa Barnby and Leanne T. Brown for editing this dissertation
- Ms Elsabe Nell, subject librarian for Theology at UNISA, for her continual support.
- Nadoumngar Mardochee, Dean of SEST for his sacrifices and companionship.
- My friends, brothers and sisters in Christ in South Africa, Chad and overseas, for your tireless moral and material support.

I give my thanks to Dr Abel Djerareou, former head of Bangui Evangelical Graduate School of Theology “BEGST” (Central African Republic) for his advice and help in getting me the task to learn to love the Old Testament. He has advised me from the beginning, and I shared many hours with him in discussing the biblical text.

To my family and relatives, I would like say thanks for their patience and sacrifice. I have attempted to spend as much time with them as possible, hoping that they would not feel neglected.

Finally, I wish to thank my friends and relatives, to whom this dissertation is lovingly dedicated.

# **Dedication**

“To those who are involved in religious and political responsibility,  
To those who have in their heart a sense of responsibility to lead people,  
To those who are concerned with responsibility,  
To those who are struggling in terms of responsibility,  
To those who dream of being responsible in any way,  
I lovingly dedicate this study”

E D LAWMAN MOURNA

## ABBREVIATIONS

ACT	Assemblees Chretiennes au Tchad
BCE	Before Common Era/ Before Christian Era
BEGST	Bangui Evangelical Graduate School of Theology
1,2 Chr	Chronicles
D	Deuteronomist (sources)
Dt	Deuteronomy
E	Elohist
ESTES	Ecole Superieure de Theologie Evangelique - Shalom
Ex	Exodus
Gn	Genesis
Is	Isaiah
J	Yahwist (sources)
Josh	Joshua
Jr	Jeremiah
1,2 Ki	Kings
Lv	Leviticus
NCC	Newtown Community Church (Australia)
Nb	Numbers
P	Priests (sources)
Pr	Proverbs
OCI	Overseas Council International (USA)
OT	Old Testament
REB	Revised English Bible
Rt	Ruth
1,2 Sm	Samuel
SEST	Shalom Evangelical School of Theology
UNISA	University of South Africa
V, (vv)	Verse (verses)
Zach	Zachariah

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Pages
Title .....	i
Declaration .....	ii
Summary .....	iii
Acknowledgement .....	iv
Dedication .....	vi
Abbreviations .....	vii
Table of contents .....	viii
 CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	 1
1 Problem statement and motivation .....	1
2 The narrative as a part of the Pentateuch .....	2
2.1 The narrative and Pentateuchal Criticism .....	2
2.2 The narrative as "a bridge" .....	5
2.3 The narrative plot and the quinary scheme .....	7
3 The narrative as a wisdom novel .....	8
4 Summary .....	13
 CHAPTER 2: WISDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY .....	 14
1 Introduction .....	14
2 The meaning of wisdom and responsibility .....	14
2.1 The meaning of wisdom .....	15
2.2 The meaning of responsibility .....	16
3 Ancient Israelite wisdom .....	17
4 Responsibility as wisdom ideal .....	24
5 Summary .....	28
 CHAPTER 3: THE INITIAL SITUATION (Gn 37:1–11) .....	 29
1 Introduction .....	29
2 Pericope .....	29



3	The scenes .....	30
3.1	Macro scene .....	30
3.2	Micro scene .....	30
3.2.1	Toledoth (vv.1–2a).....	30
3.2.2	The relationship between Joseph and his brothers.....	31
3.2.3	The dreams (vv.5–11) .....	31
4	The characters .....	33
4.1	The relationship between Joseph and his father .....	33
4.2	The relationship between Joseph and his brothers.....	34
4.3	The relationship between the brothers and their father.....	36
5	The acts .....	36
5.1	The responsibility of Jacob as the head of the family.....	36
5.2	The responsibility of Joseph towards his father.....	37
5.3	The responsibility of Joseph towards his brothers .....	37
5.4	The responsibility of the brothers towards their father .....	37
5.5	The responsibility of Jacob towards his sons.....	39
6	Summary .....	40
CHAPTER 4: THE COMPLICATION (Gn 37:12–36).....		43
1	Introduction.....	43
2	Pericope.....	43
3	The scenes .....	44
3.1	The macro scene .....	44
3.2	The micro scene .....	45
3.2.1	Jacob’s initiative in sending Joseph to look for his brothers .....	45
3.2.2	Joseph’s brothers’ strategic attack .....	46
3.2.3	Joseph's predicament as a result of his brothers' deed .....	46
3.2.4	Who are those who sold Joseph? .....	47
3.2.5	The concealment of the deed and Jacob's grief.....	48
4	The characters .....	48

4.1	The relationship between Joseph and his father .....	48
4.2	The relationship between Joseph and his brothers.....	49
4.3	The relationship between the brothers and their father.....	51
5	The acts .....	52
5.1	The responsibility of Joseph and his father.....	52
5.2	The responsibility of Joseph and his brothers.....	54
5.3	The responsibility of the brothers and their father.....	55
6	Summary .....	57
CHAPTER 5: A 'BRIDGE' IN THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE (Gn 38:1–30).....		59
1	Introduction.....	59
2	Pericope.....	60
3	The scenes .....	61
3.1	Macro scene .....	61
3.2	Micro scene .....	61
4	The initial situation (Gn 38:1–11).....	62
5	The complication (Gn 38:12–19).....	65
6	Transforming action (Gn 38:20–23) .....	68
7	The denouement (Gn 38:24–26) .....	68
8	The final situation (Gn 38:27–30).....	70
9	Summary .....	72
CHAPTER 6: TRANSFORMING ACTION (Gn 39:1–41:57).....		74
1	Introduction.....	74
2	Pericope.....	75
3	The scenes .....	78
3.1	Macro scene .....	78
3.2	Micro scenes .....	78
4	The characters .....	79
4.1	Relationship between Joseph and Potiphar.....	79

4.2	Relationship between Joseph and two officials in prison .....	82
4.3	Relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh .....	83
5	The acts .....	84
5.1	Responsibility of Joseph towards Potiphar .....	84
5.2	Responsibility of Joseph towards the prisoners .....	87
5.3	Responsibility of Joseph towards Pharaoh .....	88
6	Summary .....	89
CHAPTER 7: THE DENOUEMENT (Gn 42:1–45:15) .....		92
1	Introduction .....	92
2	Pericope .....	93
3	The scenes .....	97
3.1	Macro scene .....	97
3.2	Micro scene .....	97
4	The characters .....	97
4.1	The relationship between Joseph and his brothers .....	98
4.2	The relationship between the brothers and their father .....	103
4.3	The relationship between Joseph and his father .....	107
5	The acts .....	107
5.1	Responsibility of Joseph and his father .....	107
5.2	Responsibility of Joseph and his brothers .....	108
5.3	Responsibility of the brothers and their father .....	113
6	Summary .....	116
CHAPTER 8: THE FINAL SITUATION (Gn 45:16–50:25) .....		120
1	Introduction .....	120
2	Pericope .....	120
3	The scenes .....	126
3.1	Macro scene .....	126
3.2	Micro scene .....	127

4	The characters .....	127
4.1	Relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh .....	128
4.2	Relationship between Jacob and his sons .....	129
4.3	Relationship between Joseph and his father .....	130
4.4	Relationship between Joseph and his brothers.....	132
4.5	Relationship between Jacob and Pharaoh .....	133
5	The acts .....	136
5.1	Responsibility of Joseph towards Pharaoh .....	136
5.2	Responsibility of Joseph towards his father.....	138
5.3	Responsibility of Joseph towards his brothers.....	139
5.4	Responsibility of Jacob towards Pharaoh .....	142
5.5	Responsibility of Jacob towards his sons.....	143
6	Summary .....	145
CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION .....		147
1	The Joseph narrative as wisdom narrative .....	147
2	The quinary scheme .....	148
2.1	The initial situation .....	148
2.2	The complication .....	150
2.3	The transforming action.....	151
2.4	The denouement.....	152
2.5	The final situation .....	156
3	Conclusion .....	157
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....		159

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1 Problem statement and motivation

The Joseph narrative (Gn 37–50) has been the focus of numerous studies since Von Rad's stimulating article entitled "Josephgeschichte und ältere Cokma" (1953). This study does not claim to be totally new, but will look at the narrative from a different angle to previous studies. It will focus on the issue of responsibility as a wisdom ideal, and try to analyse the narrative with this ideal in mind. This study takes its cue from a number of recent publications; the first one being the book entitled *How to read Bible stories* by Marguerat and Bourquin (1999). Although this book is part of a popular "How to ..." series, it introduces readers to an important new development in the study of the Bible, namely reading Bible stories as narratives. In a preliminary study of the Joseph narrative, it became evident that these authors' discussion of the "quinary scheme" fits the plot of the Joseph narrative like a glove. This quinary scheme starts with the initial situation and then deals with the complication, after which it moves to the transforming action and the denouement, ending with the final situation, which summarises the findings of the story. This scheme will be used in the discussion of the theme of responsibility in the Joseph narrative.

The issue of responsibility will be discussed when the acts of the characters are analysed. The triangle (father, Joseph and brothers) will be discussed in terms of the following relationships: (1) Joseph and his father; (2) Joseph and his brothers; and (3) the brothers and their father. The issue of responsibility will be treated within the context of the ancient Israelite wisdom teaching. In this regard, attention will be given to the publications of Crenshaw (1969; 1976), Loader (1986; 1997) and Murphy (1990) concerning the understanding of ancient Israelite wisdom. This study will firstly analyze the narrative according to the quinary scheme, then it will focus on the wisdom influence and lastly it will discuss the importance of growth: from being irresponsible to being responsible will summarise the finding of this dissertation.

## 2 The narrative as a part of the Pentateuch

### 2.1 The narrative and Pentateuchal criticism

Nobody can ignore the fact that the Pentateuch is full of repetitions and inconsistencies, as far as some of the writings are concerned. The Pentateuch was composed of sources emanating from different ages, and which were gradually accepted. The Professor of Medicine and court physician to Louis XV, the Paris doctor, Jean Astruc (1684–1766), and the French Catholic priest, Richard Simon (1638–1712), played a significant role in the discovery of the different sources. In 1753, Astruc published a book entitled *Conjectures about the documents which Moses seems to have used in writing the book of Genesis*. At this time, many scholars conducted investigations in a wide variety of fields. Astruc supposed that Moses had used ancient documents. In one of these, God was referred to by the Hebrew word *Elohim* and in others by the name *Yahweh*. Besides these two major documents, Moses also used the frameworks of other works, and wrote them all down in four parallel columns. Other scholars, by applying this to the remaining books of the Pentateuch, found it difficult to pinpoint the original document. After the 19th century, the four-document theory was embraced by many, and it was suggested that the Pentateuch was the result of the combination of four documents which were originally independent and separate. This theory was extended to the five books of the Pentateuch by a German orientalist, J G Eichhorn (1780–83), and assembled by K D Ilgen (1798) and H Hupfeld (1853), and was then worked out in its classic form in the works of K H Graf (1866), A Kuenen (1869–70) and J Wellhausen (1876–89). Wellhausen provided clarification on the four documents in question (Vergote 1959:3–7).

The first source is called the Yahwist (J), because it uses the name Yahweh in Genesis. However, God reveals Himself to Moses with this name. This document is most likely to have been written in the 10th century BCE in the Kingdom of Judah. It was thought to have been composed around the middle of the 10th century.

The second source is called the Elohist (E), because up to the time of Moses' calling, God was commonly known as Elohim. This document is most likely to have been written in Israel in the first half of the 8th century BCE. These two documents were combined in the new document,

known as JE.

The third source was written in the 7th century BCE, and is commonly known as Deuteronomy. It was added to the two abovementioned documents after Josiah's Reform in 621 BCE, and was then called JED. Deuteronomy, written shortly before it was discovered under King Josiah in 621 BCE, was attached to JE.

The fourth source, P, is the Priestly document which contains the laws, and was supposed to have originated in the second half of the 5th century (between 500 and 450 BCE). It served as a framework into which the documents JED were incorporated in 400 BCE. It is called the Sacerdotal Code, with the symbol (P) coming from the German words "Priesterschrift" or "Priestercodex". It was compiled after the exile, and became known as JEDP, which is the form of the Pentateuch as we know it today.

This is the classical understanding of the sources behind the Pentateuch. However, these days scholars are questioning the periods during which they were written and the existence of some of the documents themselves. The documentary theory, which dominated literary criticism for more than half a century, is facing a crisis in which scholars are proposing different ideas and solutions. As argued by Vergote (1959:3–7), scholars such as Volz and Rudolf believe that the existence of an independent Elohist source suggests that an Elohist is the author of the new edition of the Yahwist, although they believe that an interpolator could have completed its narrative. Others have adopted an attitude in opposition to the Sacerdotal or Priestly Code. For other scholars, such as those belonging to the Scandinavian school of exegesis, for example, Nyberg, Birkeland, Pedersen and Engnell, less importance is given to the redaction of the book than the form of the traditions. This school is more interested in oral traditions, according to which the same events are expressed differently because of the different contexts in which they have been told (Vergote 1959:3–7).

Therefore, on the basis of their criteria, three sources or documents have been commonly accepted. According to some, J and E are the same source, and are sometimes referred to as E1 and E2. Other scholars have found that E1 is the oldest and most fundamental of the

Pentateuch's sources. However, others still have claimed that it was later and not earlier. According to them, J and E were not considered to represent individual authors, but rather schools of narrators. The source D, which comprised a large part of the book of Deuteronomy, is identified as the law book which plays a role in the great reform under King Josiah (2 Ki 22–23). It is clear that the various parts which make up the present Pentateuch have been brought together into a unified document – therefore, in order to interpret this work, one has to become involved in some of the questions which the Pentateuch poses. In this regard, one can ask where the Joseph narrative fits into the Pentateuch.

Loader (1977:24), referring to Von Rad, indicates where J, E and P can be identified in the Joseph narrative. Sometimes, he faces difficulties in identifying the source of Genesis 48:20. However, in his view, it seems to be original and was “an independent chokmatic novel”. Like other scholars, the passages ascribed to E have the same chokmatic quality as those ascribed to J. It is too much of a coincidence to suppose that two separate sources (southern and northern kingdom) both used exactly the same wisdom story with exactly the same aim, and in exactly the same way. Loader (1977:25), with reference to Van Selms, argues the following: “the great difference between the Joseph novel and other patriarchal narratives cannot be accounted for”. Therefore, “The Joseph story is developed on a purely human plane, whereby Joseph is represented as a man of wisdom, with an allusion to Solomon” (Loader 1977:25). However, the wisdom in Israel is much older than the monarchy in the time of Solomon.

A careful reading of the narrative reveals that documents E and J contain the full story of Joseph, as suggested in the following:

... it has usually supposed that there were originally two distinct versions of Joseph story (J and E). And it seems to allow for the structural and artistic unity of the story while successfully accounting for the existence of such phenomena as repetitions, doublets, and others vocabulary, style and signs of distinct sources which are the foundation of Pentateuchal sources criticism (Whybray 1968:522–523).

Each of them, with variations, relates the same events, but one presents Judah, and the other



Ruben, as the protagonist. The combination of these two sources gave way to the episode of Dothan (Gn 37:14-29) through the cutting and assembling of the texts.

## **2.2 The narrative as "a bridge"**

As already stated, this study will first draw a sketch of the place of Genesis in the Pentateuch. In terms of the meaning of the name Pentateuch, “pent” means “five” and “teuch” means “scroll” or “volume”. Prior to the scientific study of the Old Testament, people believed that Moses was the author of the Pentateuch. During the Reformation, Martin Luther (1483–1546), the Protestant reformer, was so convinced of this that he even renamed the first five books of the Old Testament. He called Genesis “The First Book of Moses”, Exodus “The Second Book of Moses”, Leviticus “The Third Book of Moses,” and so on. The Pentateuch itself was now read from the Hebrew text, and all kinds of things were observed which, until then, had been unrecognisable in the usual Latin translation. However, a critical study of the Pentateuch reveals that Moses could not have written all the books and stories. As Grollenberg (1978:11) says, “in addition to repetitions and inconsistencies in the content of these text, scholars of the 16th and 17th centuries also observed many differences in style and diction which made the attribution to one author very improbable”.

Certainly, the Joseph story does not reveal an exact date. Nevertheless, it is not timeless. Not only does it sit at the end of the patriarchal period as a bridge to the exodus, the end of life for the patriarch Jacob, but it has its roots in the Egyptian court (Coats 1973:294). Redford recognises that the story in Genesis 39–41 has its setting in an Egyptian court (Redford 1970: 66–68). The arguments against a close relationship between the Joseph story and ancient wisdom are now well known. Coats (1973:296) suggests that the novella as a whole resists efforts to tie down its sources of inspiration and cultural and intellectual background to one specific time and place.

The context of the Joseph narrative is in fact a continuation of the story of Jacob. The author’s concern in this last toledoth section of the book (Gn 37:2) is to narrate not only the Joseph story, but also the history of the whole family of Jacob. The leading figures are the sons, Judah and Joseph, who will eventually become the leading tribes of the future nation of Israel (Gn 49).

Thus, the Joseph narrative is clearly embedded in the wider context of the book of Genesis. The Joseph story ends with an explicit statement, by showing the gradual fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham's descendants growing in number, and their influence in a foreign land (Gn 12:1–3 and 50:24). The future “journey out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan is precisely followed in Exodus and Deuteronomy, and even as far as the book of Joshua” (Wilson 2004:232–234). This journey is also symbolised by the final two verses of the Joseph story (Gn 50:25–26). Joseph makes the Israelites swear that when God visits them, they will take his bones with them. In examining this verse, it is evident that Joseph was not buried in Egypt, but rather that his bones were placed in a coffin and taken with the Israelites to Canaan. The verse refers to Exodus 13:19, which records that Moses took Joseph's bones with him when the Israelites left Egypt, and the burial of these bones is later mentioned in Joshua 24:32. There is no doubt that the Joseph narrative has a place in the Pentateuch (as in Exodus 1:1–7, which indicates that the descendants of Israel multiplied greatly in Egypt, which refers to the promise of Abraham) and also in Joshua. When one looks at Exodus 1:8, which mentions the new king of Egypt, this means that the Moses narrative needs to be understood in the context of Joseph being in Egypt.

It is also important to review or place the Joseph story in the Pentateuch. In fact, a close reading of the book of Genesis reveals that it consists of a number of separate narratives which are in some way or another related to each other. The first eleven chapters in the book contain stories about the “early history” of human beings on earth (Gn 1–11). This is followed by stories about the ancestors of Israel (Gn 12–36) before one gets to the Joseph narrative (Gn 37–50). Genesis is, however, a part of the Pentateuch. The main theme of the Pentateuch may be described as “how Israel became a great nation and took possession of the Promised Land” (Ex 1:7–10). The Joseph narrative forms a bridge between the stories about God's promises to the patriarchs and the eventual fulfilment of these promises. Hence, the Joseph narrative is linked to other stories in the Pentateuch.

In considering the Joseph story (Gn 37–50), one finds that it has a place in the discussion of the documentary theory. For example, Genesis 45:1–5 is considered to belong to the Yahwist, because it is a part of the pericope of Genesis 46:28–47:6b, which is related to this story (Joseph's invitation to his brothers to come and settle in Goshen). Genesis 48:5–6 reproduces

the Elohist version of the adoption of the son of Joseph. Genesis 48:8–22 represents the Yahwist tradition, as does Genesis 50:15–26.

However, it seems that the presence, sovereignty and guidance of God in dreams is a means of divine revelation in Genesis 37–45, which is more subtle and opaque than in Genesis 28. His intervention in the affairs of Egypt helped them to plan for the seven years of famine, and saved the lives of many people far beyond the borders of Egypt (Gn 41:57), and this was the wisdom of God's plan for the covenant people descended from the patriarchs (Gn 50:20). Wilson (2004: 234) argues the following:

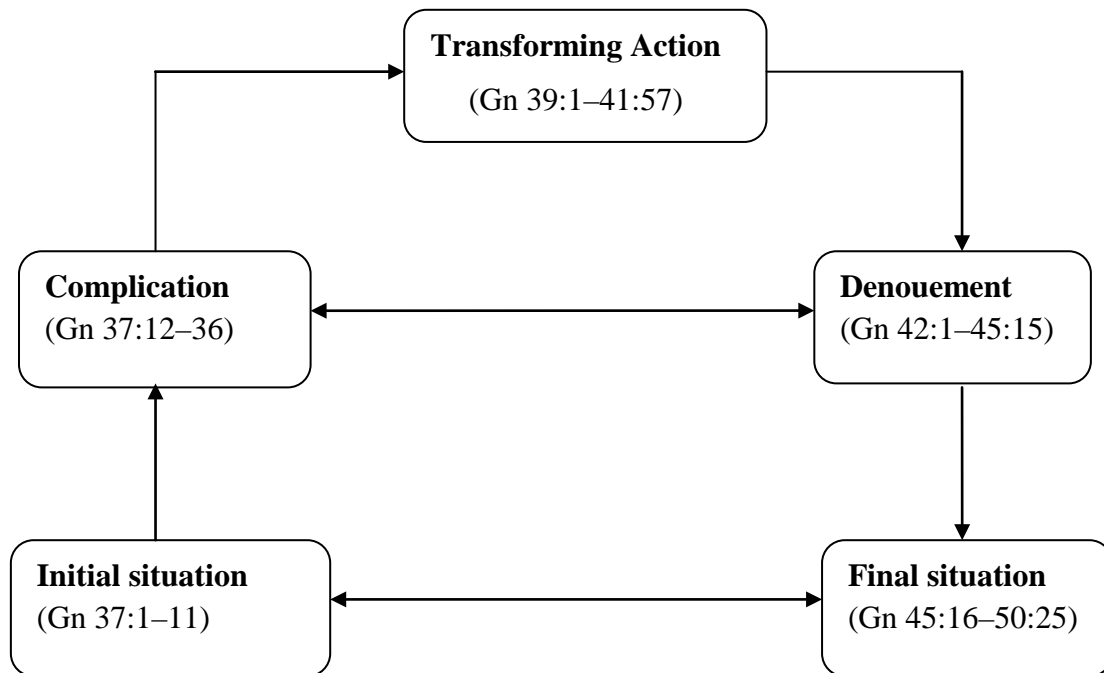
The Joseph story seems to exceed the requirement for a mere bridge and suggests that the Joseph story does provide, de facto a transition from the patriarchal narratives to the Exodus. His links with Exodus and with the rest of the Pentateuch is the high significance of the promises in the final form of Genesis 37–50.

The connection between the Joseph narrative and the rest of the Pentateuch is very significant. It is in fact the highlight of the promises in the final passages of Genesis 37–50. In its present form, Genesis 38:27–30 ends with the births of Perez and Zerah (Wilson (2004:234)). Therefore, Genesis 38 seems to be the crux of the story. As this study has previously mentioned, the Joseph narrative also refers to the court history of David when reference is made to the genealogy. Nevertheless, this study can say that this narrative was written before the early part of the monarchical period because of the different factors (the customs and social structure of a distant nation, the magnificence of Pharaoh's court, the installation of the vizier, the storage of cereal crops, the mummification of dead bodies) that link the Joseph narrative even more closely to the spiritual outlook of this period.

### **2.3 The narrative plot and the quinary scheme**

The quinary scheme, which is the basis of this dissertation, presents five important elements which illustrate how the acts of the characters will be judged. The first point is focused in the *initial situation* (Gn 37:1–11) which will develop the relationship in the triangle (Joseph – father – brothers). The second will link to the *complication* (Gn 37:12–36) which will focus on

the selling of Joseph as the main point of the plot. The third will deal with the *transforming action* (Gn 39:1–41:57) where Joseph, as a slave sold in Egypt, will be modelled according to the circumstances that he is going to face. The fourth will draw us to the *denouement* (Gn 42:1–45:15), which focuses on the dramatic starvation in the world and Joseph brothers’ predicament in facing Joseph as the vizier of Egypt during their two trips to fetch grain. The fifth more focused point in the *final situation* (Gn 45:16–50:25) will end with the reconciliation between the brothers and their seat in Egypt. Here is the quinary scheme that I am going to use test in the next chapters of this dissertation.



### 3 The narrative as a wisdom novel

In order to define the narrative as a wisdom novel, it is necessary to understand the difference between the narrative, the story and the wisdom. Marguerat and Bourquin (1999:15) define the narrative as “[in] telling a story you must first of all construct a world, furnished as much as possible, down to the smallest details”. Therefore, they justify the fact that “telling the story is not simply transmitting but constructing a world, the world of the narrative, with its codes and

its rules for functioning” (Marguerat & Bourquin 1999:15-16). If a narrative is not simply transmitting, but also constructing, it means that a “narrative is discourse starting with facts linked together in a temporal sequence (chronological order) and with a causal link (order of configuration). The narrative is the product of narrative activity” (Marguerat & Bourquin 1999:21). The important thing to note is the fact that there are four factors that are needed for a narrative, as argued by Marguerat and Bourquin (1999:16):

... 1) a temporal succession of actions/events; 2) the presence of an agent-hero; inspired by an intention which draws the story towards its close; 3) A plot which overhangs the chain of events and integrates them into the unity of a single action; 4) A relationship of causality and consecutiveness which structures the plot by an interplay of causes and effects.

Therefore, Allen (2004:1388) views a narrative as “an account of incidents or events; an anecdote or the plot of a literary or dramatic word”. However, Marguerat and Bourquin (1999:20) explain a narrative as a “material entity – it is the narrative statement that readers have before their eyes or to which hearers listen”. Thus, the story can be depicted in a narrative. Furthermore, history is a branch of knowledge that records and interprets past events (as a whole) or an account of past events (Allen 2004:660). However, the Joseph narrative is not a history, but rather a story which relates the chronological order that it supposes.

In terms of the Joseph narrative, Fokkelman (1999:74) argues that “many biblical stories consist of well-planned combination or alternation of report and speech: there are some sequences of sub-actions presented by the narrator, which alternate with sequences of clauses containing direct speech”. There is a plot in the Joseph narrative which “is an organization of the action in such a way as to result in an ingenious combination of the *horizontal* and the *vertical* arrangement” (Fokkelman 1999:78). In the context of the Joseph narrative, the literary unit “Joseph in Dothan” which starts with Genesis 37:12–18, Joseph is presented as a “hero and it is he who executes the quest” Fokkelman (1999:79). And, the situation in Dothan “Joseph has changed from the subject into the object, and it is no coincidence that we do not hear another word from his mouth” (Fokkelman 1999:79). It shows that the Joseph narrative is in

fact a story. Therefore, Joseph is the main character in the story which starts in Genesis 37 and ends in Genesis 50.

“Joseph is always and only an individual person, whose exemplary character is also presumably intended to be taken as a model for other individuals also” (Moberly 1992:33). “Another distinctive characteristic of the Joseph narrative is the fact that, unlike Abraham or Jacob, there is never any hint in the text that Joseph typifies or embodies Israel as a people” (Moberly 1992:33). As a priggish teenager, “his experience of suffering seems have rapidly matured him into a serene man of faith, who patiently endures unjust imprisonment, ultimately being rewarded by promotion to Viceroy of Egypt” (Moberly 1992:33). Furthermore, Joseph is the central figure in these chapters. His behaviour (towards his brothers, despite its puzzling nature, should be seen as some kind of well-intentioned test) “is somehow to be linked to the fulfilment of God’s purposes” (Moberly 1992:35). The Joseph story as a narrative relates or narrates a story. It is suggested that “Joseph’s story is a unit from the first scene to the last” (Coats 1992:977). However, in digressing from the present position as (Genesis 39–41) during the development of the narrative about Joseph and his brothers, this “unit reveals itself as a story within a story, a story with its own independent structure, genre and intention” (Coats 1992:977).

In any event, there is a plot in the Joseph narrative, which is an organisation of the action. In the context of the Joseph narrative, the literary unit (Gn 37:12–18) presents Joseph as “a hero, and it is he who executes the quest” (Fokkelman 1999:79). Furthermore, novels and short stories are narratives built around a plot that moves from the establishment of tension, through complications to its resolution. The plot comprises one or more situations or events (Humphreys 1985:83). A short story reveals the nature of a character or situation, while a novel develops characters or situations (Humphreys 1985:84). Finally, “a novella shares all that a novel and short story have in common” (Humphreys 1985:84). In this particular case, if the Joseph narrative is a novella, it is also prose and not poetry. Prose not only describes events, “but also depicts conversations between characters”. One finds this in interchanges between Joseph and Pharaoh (Gn 41) and between Joseph and his brothers. The Joseph narrative has within it several reports of dreams and their interpretation (Gn 40, 41), a formal court speech

(Gn 48:18–34), genealogical lists (Gn 46:8–37) and blessings (Gn 48:15–16, 20), and ends with ancient “tribal poetry in the form of a patriarch’s last words (Gn 49)” (Humphreys 1985:88). Crenshaw (1969:136), referring to Humphreys (1985:216), adds that the Joseph story “begins and ends with an account of Joseph’s frustration in terms of his relationship with his family. He fails to control his emotions at crucial points”.

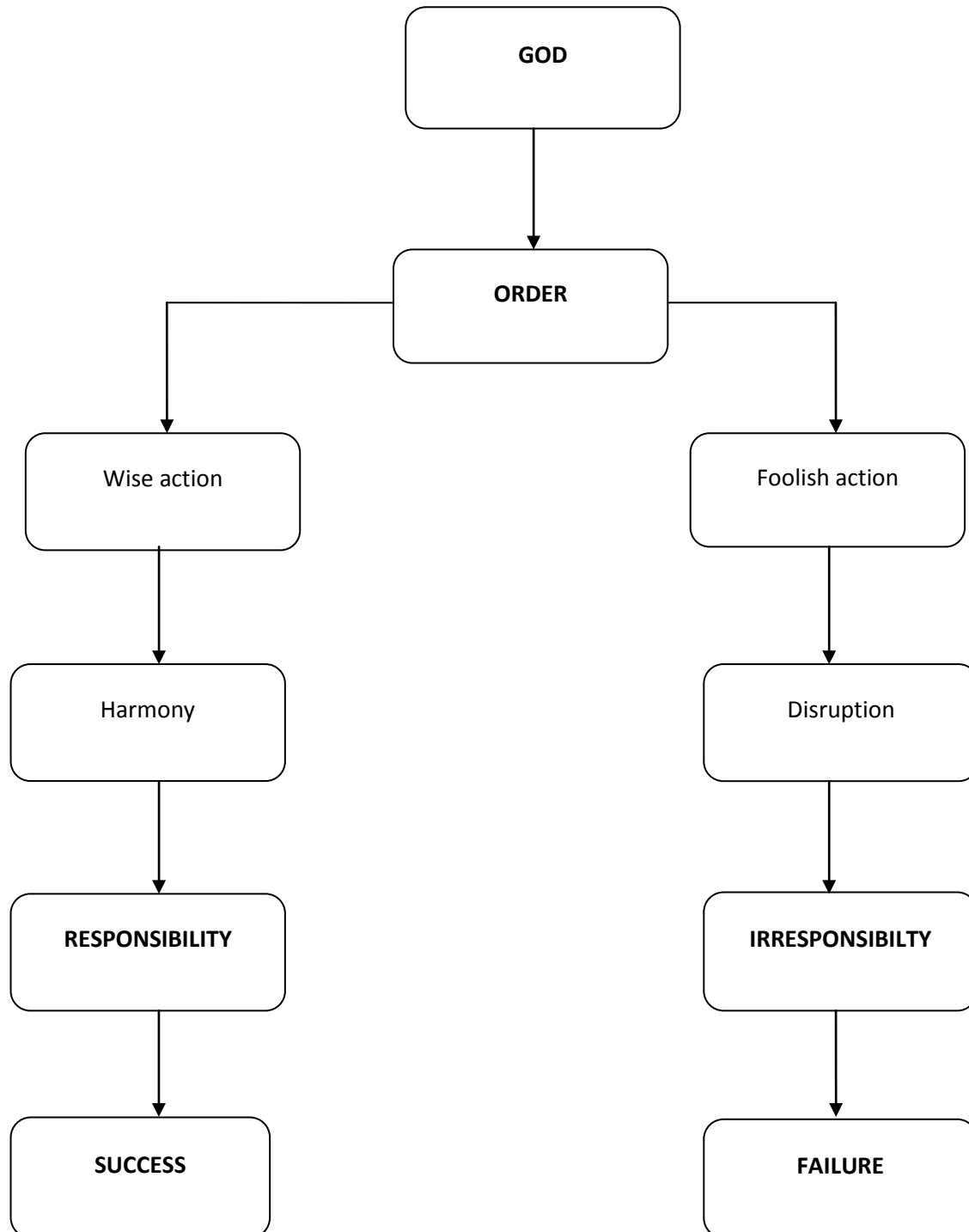
The Joseph story is in every respect distinct from the patriarchal narratives. The Joseph narrative is a novel through and through, and the material is in no way associated at any point with genuine local traditions. Indeed, the story of Joseph as a novel, his behaviour towards his brothers, the conflict between him and his brothers, and his trials, wisdom, success and happiness during his time in Egypt all need to be appreciated because he was being guided by God.

In fact, the Joseph narrative is closely related to earlier wisdom writings, as a manifestation of the educational ideal in ancient Israelite wisdom. It takes place in the Pharaoh’s court, where he exercises his responsibility (Gn 39:1–41:57).

Can the narrative be a wisdom novel? If one considers Loader’s words (1986:108) that “wisdom is about so orienting oneself in the world as to live a harmonious life”, it is easy to understand Loader’s view of the Joseph narrative when he demonstrates that “if man obeys the rules of wisdom, he is acknowledging God’s authority and is participating in God’s order; he is then being wise, and for his wisdom he is rewarded with success and prosperity” (Loader 1986:110). Then, “it is God himself who decides the reward...” “If the condition for success is man’s compliance with the rules of wisdom, such compliance also implies man’s acceptance of authority” (Loader 1986:110). This means that “compliance with the rules of wisdom implies submission to authority”. From wise actions, man lives a harmonious life, and the result of this is success. In this case, wisdom reveals responsibility. On the other hand, if man disregards the rules, he is opposing God’s authority and thus disrupts God’s order – he is being a fool, and for his folly is rewarded with failure and adversity. In this case, folly reveals irresponsibility.

This scheme as follows will pick up the importance of the growth from being irresponsible to

being responsible which will be the conclusion of this dissertation.





## 4 Summary

The Joseph narrative, which is the main focus of this dissertation, will be discussed by taking into consideration the element revealed in the “quinary scheme”. This quinary scheme will start with the initial situation and then deals with the complication, after which it moves to the transforming action and the denouement, ending with the final situation, which summarises the findings of the story. This scheme will be used in the discussion of the theme of responsibility in the Joseph narrative. The wisdom, which is the “key player”, will also be examined as a focal point of this dissertation

Therefore, my argument will be developed through the different chapters as follows: In chapter 2, wisdom will be treated and examined as the framework of the ancient Israelite wisdom teachers. It will ground this study on fact by determining the difference between ancient Israel wisdom and the Teaching of Amenemope.

Chapter 3, which starts with the “quinary scheme”, will be focused **on** the *initial situation* (Gn 37:1-11), which will develop the relationship in the triangle (Joseph – father – brothers). Chapter 4 will link to the *complication* (Gn 37:12–36), which will focus on the selling of Joseph as the main point of the plot. Chapter 5 which is focused on Genesis 38, appears as a “bridge” in the Joseph story and is seen as an interlude between chapters 37 and 39 of Genesis. This section seems independent, but it relates the lives of his other sons, even though Joseph does not appear, nor is he mentioned in the story. Nevertheless, it makes a significant contribution to the Joseph story.

Chapter 6 will deal with the *transforming action* (Gn 39:1–41: 57) where Joseph, as a slave sold in Egypt, will be modelled according to the circumstances that he is going to face. Chapter 7 will draw us to the *denouement* (Gn 42:1–45: 15) and will focus more on the dramatic starvation and Joseph’s brothers’ situation during their two trips to fetch grain. Chapter 8 will link with the *final situation* (Gn 45:16-50: 25) which will end with the reconciliation between the brothers and their seat in Egypt. Chapter 9 will summarise the findings of this dissertation.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **WISDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY**

#### **1 Introduction**

As mentioned in the first chapter, the main focus of this study is on responsibility. It is best to first understand the meaning of this word, and then the important “key player”, that is, wisdom, can also be examined as a focal point of this dissertation. Three issues will be discussed in this section: firstly, the meaning of wisdom and responsibility by revealing their importance to this study. Secondly, the issue of responsibility will be treated within the framework of the ancient Israelite wisdom teachers, which will ground this study on fact by determining the difference between ancient Israel wisdom and the Teaching of Amenemope, as discussed by Emerton (2001:431-465). Finally, the importance of responsibility as a wisdom ideal will be examined. This approach will lead to the issue of responsibility in the Joseph narrative, and will focus on the three characters and acts revealed in the quinary scheme that follows.

#### **2 The meaning of wisdom and responsibility**

Before defining wisdom, it is important to differentiate between wisdom, the wise and knowledge, and sometimes insight and ability. Hunter (2006:3) reveals the confusion in the minds of most people regarding this issue, even among scholars. He argues that “in modern usage we think someone is wise if they are widely knowledgeable and show signs of being able to apply that knowledge in a sensitive and imaginative manner...” (Hunter 2006:3). However, having a certain depth of understanding and insight, and an ability to ‘read’ the world, is a rather special quality. Soanes and Stevenson (2006:789) argue that knowledge itself is “information and skills acquired through experience or education. It is the sum of what is known”. Thus, insight is viewed as a “capacity to gain an accurate and deep understanding of something” (Soanes & Stevenson 2006:735) and “ability is a possession of the means or skill to do something” (Soanes & Stevenson 2006:3).

Hunter (2006:3) also tries to establish a relationship between being wise and wisdom in term of education as follows: “being wise is not dependent upon education; however those who are

instinctively wise benefit from education; and some who are not at first wise become so through the educational process; but many survive quite extensive periods of study without ever acquiring wisdom”. However, the idea is clear in our mind that, as Soanes and Stevenson (2006:1655) suggest, a wise person is someone “having or showing experience, knowledge and good judgement”. Their point of view comes close to that of Hunter. Therefore, wisdom is a “quality of being wise” or the “body of knowledge and experience that develops within a specified society or period” (Soanes & Stevenson 2006:1655). However, wisdom is “an understanding of the highest principles of things that function as a guide for living a truly exemplary human life” (Audi 1999:976).

This reflection brings one to a better understanding of the meaning of wisdom and responsibility, as well as their importance in this study.

## **2.1 The meaning of wisdom**

In this study, the meaning of wisdom will focus on etymological senses, by referring to dictionaries, and then the arguments of scholars will further guide the research.

The meaning of wisdom goes together with the adjective “wise”. Wisdom reveals a “quality of being wise”, a “good sense of judgment” or the “body of knowledge and experience that develops within a specified society or period” (Allen 2004:161). How can these meanings be applied to the Joseph narrative?

Scholars define wisdom according to their own understanding and perspectives. Crenshaw (1976:3) refers to Von Rad, who defines “wisdom as broadly as possible”. Therefore, wisdom is practical knowledge of the law of life and the world, based on experience. Crenshaw (1976:4) argues that wisdom is the “art of succeeding in human life, both private and collective. It is grounded in humanism, in reflexion and observation of the course of things and the conduct of man”. Therefore, he finds that wisdom is the “totality of life experiences transmitted by a father to his son, as a spiritual testament” and is also the “ability to cope” (Crenshaw 1976:4). However, Whybray (1974:135) avoids the term ‘wisdom’ in favour of “intellectual tradition”. He has discerned better than most the fact that these definitions founder at one point

or another, since ‘wisdom’ is an attitude, a body of literature and a living tradition. In any event, wisdom asks what is good for man, and envisions the good as being health, honour, wealth and the length of days. The brief period during which wisdom research had most exposure was between 1924 and 1936, with the discovery of a definite literary relationship between the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope and Proverbs 22:17–24:22, which influenced most subsequent research (Crenshaw 1976:5). The crucial issue was the question of affinities between a biblical text and an Egyptian Instruction. However, another issue came to the fore during this flurry of scholarship, namely the structure of wisdom thought (Crenshaw 1976:6).

One can reach a clearer understanding through Crenshaw’s (1976:3–4) suggestion that there is

... the quest for self-understanding in term of relationships with things people and the creator... on three levels: (1) natural wisdom, which is an attempt to master things for human survival and well-being, and which includes the drawing up of anosmatic and the study of natural phenomena as they relate to man and the universe; (2) juridical and practical wisdom, with a focus on human relationships in an ordered society or state; and (3) theological wisdom, which operates in the realm of theodicy, and in so doing affirms God as the ultimate meaning, even when denying a purpose to life.

When this study refers to Crenshaw’s (1976:4) definition of wisdom, it has in mind that there are three different types of wisdom: firstly, clan/family wisdom, which has been taught since the earliest times, and secondly, court wisdom, which refers to the King – both of these wisdoms occurred during the time of David and Solomon. The last one is scribal wisdom, which is legal wisdom viewed as a tradition. Furthermore, the main point is to show how the Joseph narrative can be associated with wisdom. The word “responsibility” will be defined by directing us to this issue in relation to wisdom.

## **2.2 The meaning of responsibility**

As has been previously mentioned, this study, which focuses on responsibility in the Joseph narrative, deals with the text of Genesis 37–50. Therefore, it is important to understand the meaning of responsibility. In its broader sense, responsibility is a trust, charge or duty to deal

with or take care of somebody or something. It is an opportunity or ability to act independently and to take a decision without authorisation. It is also a position of authority over another, ensuring that certain things are done by him/her (Simpson 1989:742; Procher 1995:1211–1212; Wehmeier 2000:1002; Pearsall 1999:1220). It is a condition that relates to an agent's actions and the consequences connected to these actions (Audi 1999:794).

According to the above definitions, the word “responsibility” implies that it is the task of everybody who has the ability to do something. It suggests a position of superiority in doing something or accomplishing a specific task, and can be used in the family, the work environment, and also between writers. It also suggests an elevation to a higher position or being a leader. In fact, it is a service to be rendered with humility, by seeking God's will as a good *doulos* (servant), as in the case of the Joseph narrative.

Responsibility is used to refer to the person who is called upon to do and manage the task. Therefore, a responsible person is one who is able to make ethical and moral decisions by discriminating between right and wrong, and he or she is therefore morally accountable for his/her actions. Moreover, a responsible person is capable of rational behaviour, and is trustworthy or reliable. Having good judgement, an ability to act correctly and make wise decisions are other recognised qualities of a responsible person (Allen 2004:1192; Simpson 1989:742; Procher 1995:1211–1212).

### **3 Ancient Israelite wisdom**

Before defining Israel's wisdom, Crenshaw (1981:16) explains biblical wisdom as “the ability to cope”, the “art of steering” – it is “practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world, based on experience”. It constitutes “parents legacy to their children”. Therefore, Bowman (1976:9) interprets the Hebrew words “*tehillat hokhma* as the beginning of wisdom”, which is the fear of Yahweh (Ps 111:10; Pr 9:10).

In light of the various definitions, what then is Israelite wisdom? Crenshaw (1981:17–20) defines it as follows: “wisdom signifies a literary corpus”, by referring to Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. It goes beyond Israel's borders, and is

identified as “instructions” in Egyptian texts, and wise counsellors in administrative officials. Ancient Near Eastern parallels furnish an important clue as to how to define Israelite wisdom. This can assist one in determining precisely what constitutes wisdom. In this regard, wisdom is a particular attitude towards reality, a worldview, a way of looking at things. It asks what is good for men and women. And it believes that all essential answers can be learnt through experience. The fear of Yahweh is referred to as the beginning of knowledge, and also serves as the crowning achievement in relation to wisdom.

In looking at the definitions, one may be tempted to say that biblical wisdom does not seem to be far from ancient Near Eastern wisdom. Ancient Israelite wisdom was focused on the fear of the Lord, which is the basis for their faith. Automatically, the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, the principle revealed in the Torah. Therefore, there can be no doubt that Israel was supposed to fear God. In any event, the wisdom literature deserves to be considered as a valid expression of Israel’s faith (Murphy 1990:121).

However, ancient Israelite wisdom emphasised wisdom’s ethic in terms of behaviour. Crenshaw (1981:24–25) finds it

... a conviction that men and women possess the means of securing their well being—that they do not need and cannot expect divine assistance and recognize that virtue is its own rewards. It follows that wisdom is the reasoned search for specific ways to assure well-being and the implementation of those discoveries in daily existence.

Theologically speaking, wisdom constitutes an attitude toward life, a living tradition and a literary corpus. With regard to a proverb, it possesses a certain indescribable quality. As such, it is not surprising to find that “there is an intimate connection between wisdom and a proper fear (that is, awe or respect) before God” (Hunter 2006:21). This is because “the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Hunter 2006:18). It is also an instruction of wisdom, and humility comes before honour (Pr 15:33). It is very easy, according to Murphy (1990:15), “to characterize the Book of Proverbs as a compendium of ethics, of Israelite morality... A moral code undergirds it, but the real intent is to train a person,

to form character, to show what life is really like and how best to cope with it". Westermann (1986:100) specifies that

... the significance of the wisdom as an integral part of the Bible resides above all in the fact that it makes it clear that the creator gave man the capacity of becoming properly oriented in his world, of understanding himself in his world, and of mastering the daily tasks given him.

The wisdom experience is described as a faith experience with reference to the fear of the Lord as the basis of Israel's relationship with its creator God.

Emerton (1979:215) compares Israel wisdom with the concept of *ma'at*, the Egyptian word which means "truth", "justice" or "order". *Ma'at* is also sometimes thought of as a goddess. The Israelites, however, believed there was an inner connection between an act and its consequences (Emerton 1979:216). The Israelite view of life that he describes does not differ fundamentally from that of the Mesopotamians or the Egyptians. This means that Israelite teaching was essentially similar to that of other nations in the Ancient Near East. Thus, wise men believed that there was order in the universe, and that it was possible for men to discover this order and live according to it (Emerton 1979:218). There was no conflict with faith in Yahweh, for He was believed to have created order and to be sustaining it (Emerton 1979:220). In any event, the Torah was associated with wisdom (Emerton 1979:222). Deuteronomy 4:6 influenced the conception of clan wisdom by referring to the clan or great family in the rules given to the family by its head (Emerton 1979:223). The book of Proverbs also contains a teaching, ostensibly given by a father to his son, as well as various prohibitions (Pr. 22:22). This suggests that Israelite wisdom has a religious character (Emerton 1979:224).

These approaches all establish a fundamental relationship between Israelite and biblical wisdom. How did this wisdom influence the Joseph narrative? There was another teaching in Egypt known as Amenemope, which is similar to that in Proverbs. However, the question is: Was Proverbs written before Amenemope, or is part of Proverbs a translation of Amenemope? Emerton (2001:431) refers to Erman, who argued in 1924 that Proverbs 22:17–24:10 is

dependent on an Egyptian sapiential work, the Teaching of Amenemope. Therefore, the date of the composition of Amenemope is probably Ramesside (1250–1100 BC), and it came before Proverbs. However, this raises many questions in the minds of readers and creates confusion. Where did the author of this part of Proverbs learn about Amenemope? Did he know a Hebrew translation of the Egyptian work, or was he able to read the Egyptian text for himself? Some suggest that a Jew living in Egypt during the Persian era translated Amenemope into Hebrew or Aramaic, substituting the divine name Yahweh for references to any other deity, and making other changes to suit Jewish readers (Emerton 2001:433). Furthermore, Wilson (2004:13) believes that “there were contacts between wise men in Egypt and Israel (such as the Teaching of Amenemope)”.

Joseph is a wise person “par excellence,” an example to follow: “humility as the way to honour”. Solomon, in his dream, asks God for the discretion to govern his people (1Ki 3:9; 4:29–34). The function of a discrete mind is to distinguish between good and evil, which is a juridical task. God responded by giving Solomon both discretion and wisdom (1Ki 4:29–34). And, with these gifts, he judges his people (Coats 1973:289–290). Therefore, people respect his justice: “all Israel heard of the judgment which the king rendered. And they were in awe before the king because they saw that the wisdom of God was in his midst to render justice” (Coats 1973:290). Joseph “in the same manner, as Solomon, all the Egyptians, indeed, all the world come to Joseph and received just treatment” (Coats 1973:290).

Wilson (2004:14), with reference to Loader (1977:24–26), shows some similarities “in relation to the classical source theory. He notes that wisdom is not confined to any one source, since the putative sources J and E seem to have the same wisdom character”. Therefore, “it cannot be that both J and E rely on common groundwork predating both, as he suggests that wisdom in Israel is not older than the monarchy” (Wilson 2004:14). The Joseph story “expounds the most fundamental theological structure of the old Israelite wisdom” (1977:29), and is more than a wisdom story in which Joseph is portrayed as a model wisdom figure” (Wilson 2004:15).

However, Joseph's wisdom is different to that of Solomon. When one refers to the context of Proverbs, this difference is very clear: “A wise man has nothing to do with immoral women”



(Pr 23:27; 29:3; 31:3). “Here Joseph shows wisdom greater than Solomon” (Wilson 2004:14). The Joseph story had its *Sitz im Leben* in the royal court, and Joseph’s administrative wisdom is seen in Genesis 41:38, 39; 47:13–26. Wessels (1984:51) notes that the Joseph narrative displays evidence of knowledge of the Egyptian world; he acknowledges the influence of Egyptian wisdom literature, noting the connection between the wisdom of Amenemope and Proverbs 22–23.

Wilson (2004:21), in referring to Westermann’s (1986:247) commentary on Genesis 37–50, says that it does not make a major contribution to the debate about wisdom in the Joseph narrative. His view is that the narrative form is inconsistent with wisdom literature when he asks: “How can the Joseph story be a short story and at the same time belong to the wisdom teachings?” However, this analysis does not appear to make a significant or unique contribution to the debate about wisdom in the Joseph story. [Humphreys \(1988:176\)](#) has given a very detailed account of Joseph in a careful literary study that raises the issue of wisdom, as well as how the Joseph story secured its place in the Torah. The Joseph story is set, like Esther and Daniel, in a foreign court, and tells of the achievement of success against the odds. He regards Genesis 40–41 as pivotal to the story as a whole, detailing the rise of the hero in a court context.

The relationship between “Mesopotamian and Israelite literature differs in kind, if not in degree. The literary prototypes of Proverbs, Job and Qoheleth point more to a commonality of ideas than a direct literary relationship” (Crenshaw 1976:7). The Israelites came into contact with Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom: “the royal courts of Solomon and Hezekiah had foreign scribes, and Israelite counsellors would have worked and received their training in foreign courts”. The Canaanites possibly “mediated the wisdom tradition to ancient Israel (Crenshaw 1976:8).

Furthermore, Von Rad (2005:76) argues that the wise men at the court of Solomon would need an educational model by which to communicate their ideals to potential courtiers. Such a model exists in the Joseph story: “None would dispute the fact that this early wisdom literature belongs within the context of the royal court, and that its principal aim was to build up a

competent body of future administrators” (Von Rad 1966:293-294; 2005:76).

Joseph himself was an administrator. He had the ability to speak well at a decisive moment, give sound advice and function effectively at the king’s court. Von Rad (1966:299; 2005:80) concludes that “the Joseph story, with its strong didactic motive, belongs to the category of early wisdom writing”. Crenshaw (1976:19), referring to Coats, finds that Genesis 39–41 focuses on “Joseph’s skill as a responsible administrator”. This is because “the story within a story does reflect wisdom concerns. There is absolutely no compelling evidence that the Joseph story, the Succession Narrative, and the Yahwist come from the time of David and Solomon” (Crenshaw 1976:20). Furthermore, “the wise man is one who both creates order and brings his life into harmony with the established order of the universe”. He is also the one who knows the right time and place, the person who exercises propriety (Crenshaw 1976:23). This refers to *Shemah Israel*, meaning that the “fear of the Lord is the essence of the wisdom” (Crenshaw 1976:24), which people explained as the first principle of wisdom by which they came to express their faith in God. The fear of the Lord thus associates the Torah with wisdom (Crenshaw 1976:24–25). Therefore, the fear of the Lord is the central focus of Israel, and *Shemah Israel* is the thing that Israel most fervently believes in, their so-called “credo”.

As previously mentioned, the fact that wisdom literature focused on wisdom texts (“hear”, “know”) is not enough to influence a person. However, wisdom tradition and wisdom thinking are fundamental to the Joseph story. They refer to God’s providence, and this is shown in Joseph’s dreams. Therefore, the Joseph story is one of natural wisdom.

It appears that wisdom is a factor in the Joseph narrative between Joseph and Potiphar’s wife, who was crafty in lying to her husband, accusing the young Hebrew of something that he did not do. Potiphar was unable to analyse the situation between Joseph and his wife. Was she the “loose woman” of Proverbs? What kind of wisdom did Pharaoh and his people possess in Egypt? Was it wisdom thinking, wisdom literature or wisdom tradition? However, Egypt was the centre of wisdom teaching, which refers to Amenemope.

The Teaching of Amenemope was produced by an elite upper class, and was found in the

Hebrew book of Proverbs because of the reputation Egyptians had for being wise. The purpose of the Joseph story in Genesis is not only to talk about wisdom, but also to explain how Jacob's family came to live in Egypt, to provide, through Joseph, an example of holiness and faithfulness for all believers (Egypt was also the stronghold of divinities), and to demonstrate the partial fulfilment of the patriarchal promises. Thus, God wanted to show Egypt who He was.

The reason for Joseph rejecting the advances of Potiphar's wife, and his role as interpreter of dreams, are consistent, and he appears to be a wisdom figure. Some scholars find the Joseph story intricate and complex, qualifying it as a novella – as a whole it described life within a family, explores the actions of a political leader, and continues the story of the patriarchal promises (Coats 1973:296). Wisdom is a gift and a source of wealth from God. The Joseph story reflects an educational ideal. His outspokenness and good counsel (Gn 41; Pr 22:29); his avoiding the strange woman (Gn 39:7–12; Pr 22:14; 23:27–28); his patience and self-control (Gn 42:4; 43:30–31; 45:1; Pr 14:29–30; 12:23; 10:19); and his forbearance in terms of revenge (Gn 45:4–8; 50:14–21; Pr 24:29; 10:12) demonstrate his wisdom ideal. Therefore, “the Joseph story is a didactic wisdom-story which leans heavily upon influences emanating from Egypt, not only with regard to its conception of an educational ideal, but also in its fundamental theological ideas” (Wilson 2004:8; Von Rad 1966:300).

The presentation of Joseph as a wise man, in comparison with the book of Proverbs, shows that he is the image, “the very picture of just such a young man at his best, well bred and finely educated, steadfast in faith and versed in the ways of the world”. Anyhow, “the foundation on which such a character is built” (Von Rad 2005:77). The Joseph story, in light of the possibility that it is closely related to contemporary Egyptian literature, cannot, however, be compared to the Teaching of Amenemope. It has been created by God's wisdom. However, “the educational ideal of Amenemope is one of discretion, modesty, self-control and deliberation, the very qualities displayed by Joseph” (Von Rad 1966: 299; 2005:80). The Joseph story touches the literary artistry that escapes the power of the translator, and needs to be taught in the high schools of Egypt and used as a reference to God's wisdom. Therefore, Joseph's wisdom is a greater literary wisdom than the Teaching of Amenemope, which needs to be referred to. It

refers to the text of Psalms (32:8; 33:9) which says that God is a perfect being who instructs, teaches, guides, advises and keeps his eyes on everyone.

#### **4 Responsibility as a wisdom ideal**

The Joseph narrative is a novel which is not associated at any point with genuine local traditions (Von Rad 1966:292). However, “the ancient Israelite wisdom had such a pattern, and applied it in no uncertain manner” (Von Rad 1966:293). Therefore, the Joseph narrative demonstrates psychological and theological presuppositions, in harmony with the teachings of early wisdom literature (Von Rad 1966:292–300; Coats 1973:285). The Joseph story displays no historico-political interests or any cultic and aetiological motives. It is equally devoid of any specifically theological interest in redemptive history. One can merely “say that the Joseph story, with its strong didactic motive, belongs to the category of early wisdom writing” (Von Rad 2005:80; Coats 1973:285). Crenshaw (1969:137) challenges Von Rad’s conclusions on three points: (1) wisdom can only be proven with regard to the Joseph story if stylistic and ideological characteristics advanced as evidence are peculiar to wisdom. However, in the Joseph story, (2) wisdom can emphasise the providence of God, by making Joseph privileged to God’s providence. (3) Wisdom denies insight into God’s providence for any man. Moreover, the episode concerning Joseph’s refusal of the advances of Potiphar’s wife came to prove this: “How can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?”

The Joseph story contains non-wisdom themes. It begins and ends with an account of Joseph’s frustration in terms of his relationship with his family. He himself was not trained at school, but was chosen as counsellor because of his ‘spiritualistic’ qualifications. The story appeals to special revelations and visions, dreams and a divining cup, sacrifice, genealogy and kosher food. Furthermore, “the Joseph narrative manifested a wisdom ideal of education and theology” (Redford 1970:100–101). Redford (1970:100–104), referring to Von Rad, describes the Joseph story as wisdom writing or, perhaps better, as a wisdom novella. Redford explores the Joseph story at length. However, he does not consider Von Rad’s interpretation of the Joseph tradition to be a crucial part of the current discussion. He agrees, however, with Crenshaw’s rejection of the idea that Joseph, in Genesis 37, especially 42–45, does not fit the pattern of an ideal wise man (Redford 1970:100–104). Joseph is, moreover, the kind of man who has the skill needed

for service, and an ability to interpret dreams and to be sure of what he is saying. His ability is used without discrimination in serving his two masters in prison. His simple responsibility will be seen more clearly when he appears before the Pharaoh after languishing in prison for two years, his request unfulfilled. He shows no recrimination towards the man who forgot his request. Rather, he moves directly to the task at hand, interprets the Pharaoh's dreams, advises him about the procedure, and rises to an office of power. At each stage, the focus is on Joseph's skill as a responsible administrator. However, his skill, discretion and wisdom lead to his elevation (Coats 1973:289). The prime attribute of Joseph's skill is discretion. In Hebrew, the words *nabon* and *hakam* are used. Joseph has these attributes. He is almost too good to be true (Coats 1973:289).

The Egyptian Instruction contains four instructions: From the old kingdom come the "Instruction of Ptahhotep" and the "Instructions for Kagemni". From the new kingdom come the "Instruction of Ani" and the "Instruction of Amenemope" (Humphreys 1978:178). Thus, the motif of the wise courtier in Egyptian Instruction and Proverbs 10–29 is described in the following way: "the wise courtier is humble before his superiors, taking care to please them through a controlled and mild demeanour and careful observation of the rules of procedure that apply in the vestibule of the great" (Humphreys 1978:178; see also Ani 29 and Amenemope, chapters 26–27). "In the service of another, as a messenger, the wise courtier is faithful in the fulfilment of his duties" (Humphreys 1978:178) see Ptahhotep 17; 1; 5). Amenemope repeatedly warns against oppression or official corruption (Humphreys 1978:179 see Amenemope 6; 17; 20). "The wise courtier is a solid family man, because a wife is a source of profit" (Humphreys 1978:179 and Ptahhotep 10), comfort and support (Ani 49–50). In the home of another, he is wary (prudent) of the women, for they offer a road to death (Ptahhotep 18; Ani 49). He is a silent man and knows both the difficulty and the value of effective speech (Ptahhotep 24). The instructions are called "maxims of good speech" (Humphreys 1978:179; see also Kagemni 2: 1; 1: 1; Ani 1: 7; Amenemope, chapters 3, 9 and 10; and for a description of a silent man, see Kagemni 1: 5; Amenemope, chapter 9).

"The wise courtier is the hearer of instructions that are offered" (Humphreys 1978:179). He "who in his youth hears the instructions of the elders, and who orders his life around their

teaching, shall become himself a hearer, that is, one who in a place of authority hears the cases of others (Humphreys 1978:179; see also Ptahhotep 38–42). Ptahhotep is a “hereditary noble and Count, God’s father, beloved of the god, eldest bodily son of the king, the City Governor and Vizier” (Humphreys 1978:179). The author of the instruction for Kagemni was a Vizier, and his son was made “overseer of the residence town and Vizier. Amenemope presents his offices and titles at greater length, even though they indicate that his office was on a lower level” (Humphreys 1978:179). However, his words are also a “guide for well-being”, offering “all the principles of official procedure, the duties of the courtiers” (Humphreys 1978:179). Both Ani and his son are called “scribes” (Humphreys 1978:179).

It is not clear whether the reference is to a particular deity or to the Pharaoh. Of course, the king of Egypt was divine, and was often simply called “the god” or “the good god” (Humphreys 1978:180). The distinction is in one way not crucial, as service to the king was service to the deities. In fact, royal service rooted the courtier in the ongoing activity that sustained the created universe itself (Humphreys 1978:180). The Pharaoh was vitally linked to the creative process. He was the son of the creator, and the creator was the first creator (Humphreys 1978:180). He was the image through whom all deities functioned to preserve and sustain the created order, which in its many facets is denoted by the term *ma’at*.

For the courtier, the king was the sole source of life and, as such, the focus of his life. He is a god by whose dealings one lives, the father and mother of all men” (Humphreys 1978:180). Pharaoh was the state, god-king, son of the creator and establisher of the *ma’at*. Thus, it was upon *ma’at* that the courtier founded his life, upon that which defined and informed the created universe itself (Humphreys 1978:180). He avoided the passionate man who had lost sight of the created order. The silent man is one whose life is in harmony with the foundation of the creation – the man given to appetites and lust transgresses *ma’at* (Humphreys 1978:180). This is the ideal upheld by Ptahhotep at the end of his instruction: “I have passed 110 years of life through what the king gave to me, favours over and above those who went before, because of acting rightly for the king until the blessed state” (Humphreys 1978:180). This is the ultimate Egyptian vision of a good life.

Indeed, the instructions in Proverbs (Pr 10–22) are similar to most Egyptian Instructions specifically addressed to the courtier. This can be found in groups of king-sayings, so that the “king is placed within a supra-human sphere (where it is almost with superhuman knowledge that he judges the wicked)” (Humphreys 1978:182). Humphreys (1978:182) has suggested that in the king-sayings, the term *melek* could be replaced with Yahweh. The linking of king-sayings with those that speak of Yahweh’s powers, judgement and his ultimate incomprehensibility places the ruler in a sphere above other human beings. The two are not interchangeable, however, for while “the king manifestly belongs more to the divine than to the human sphere ... nevertheless the distance which still exists between the mightiest and the Almighty was clearly and impressively described” (Humphreys, (1978:182). For the king is set apart from other human beings, and placed on an exceedingly high level, when it is said: “do not exalt yourself in the king’s presence; nor assume the place of the great” (Pr 25–27). He is suddenly the one being addressed, and it is a ruler who clearly stands under the authority of the deity (Pr 28–29). However, the saying in Amenemope stands at the conclusion and focuses on providing, motivating, having a summary force, and giving specific orientation thereby to the material as whole. In Proverbs 22:17–24:22, it is said: “If you sit to dine with a ruler (*mosel*), observe with care what is before you; you should put a knife to your throat; if you are a man of desires (*ba‘al nepes*)”.

Nevertheless, the activity of the courtier in the Egyptian Instructions was in the relation to the king’s, and is referred to in Ptahhotep and Amenemope. It was from the king that the courtier received authority, and the king himself was considered to be a deity. Therefore, in Israel, the king was elevated above the level of other mortals. The image of the throne, which refers to the divine king of Egypt, is the same image used for Yahweh. The king is the upholder, par excellence, of order, and as this is a divinely founded order, he is associated more than other mortals with the divine sphere. In this way, we find in Israel and Mesopotamia that the king was the leader of the courtiers, the high servant of the divine sovereign. He was a courtier of the deity, but he was not divine. Yahweh stood beyond all created order. In Egypt, *ma’at* was established at the time of creation, and the gods, including the divine Pharaoh, sustained it. Therefore, in Israel, Yahweh was not bound to the order that he established.

## 5 Summary

The Joseph narrative is a didactic wisdom story which leans heavily on influences emanating from Egypt, not only with regard to its conception of an educational ideal, but also in its fundamental theological ideas (Von Rad 1966:300). Therefore, Joseph is still an example of wisdom. His humility is really remarkable, as it is said that “humility comes before honour” and “the reward of humility is riches and honour” (Von Rad 1966:296). This provided an ideal foundation for developing the potentialities of young men. Its setting in life was also the royal court. All those students who modelled their lives by following Joseph’s example were future administrators (Coats 1973:285). The educational ideal of Amenemope is one of discretion, modesty, self-control and deliberation, the very qualities displayed by Joseph. Therefore, the Joseph story belongs to the category of early wisdom writings. However, the Joseph story as natural wisdom draws us to conclude that Joseph is an ideal wise man who influenced wisdom teaching.

The Joseph narrative is an important writing, and one which reflects the Pentateuch as the fief of wisdom. There is no wisdom without the “fear of God”. Therefore, there is an intimate connection between wisdom and proper fear (i.e. awe or respect) before God. This chapter concludes by using Loader’s (1986:108–110) scheme as point of departure for discussing wisdom (cf. page 12 of this dissertation). God as the creator gives man an order that he must follow. If man performs a wise action, he will achieve harmony and then success, because his success depends on the wise action and harmony. If man performs a foolish action, he will surely cause disruption and failure. Thus, the basis of Israel’s wisdom is focused on “fear of God”. Therefore, the context of the Joseph narrative deals, not only with Egyptian Instructions and reference to ancient Israelite wisdom, but also focuses on the fear of God. Nevertheless, this issue needs to be examined more carefully and modestly in the pericope of Genesis, which will be the main focus of the quinary scheme in the next chapter.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE INITIAL SITUATION (Gn 37:1–11)

#### 1 Introduction

The initial situation, which is the focus of this chapter, opens the Joseph narrative and sets the scene for what is going to follow. This situation starts in Genesis 37: 1–11 and deals with the pericope itself. *The Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha* (REB) (1989) will be used as a basis for the discussion. After this, the characters focused on in the triangle: (1) Joseph and his father, (2) Joseph and his brothers, and (3) the brothers and their father, will be the main point of discussion in this chapter. Thereafter, acts which reflect responsibility or irresponsibility will be mentioned and discussed as well.

#### 2 Pericope

This pericope opens the scene: scene one deals with Joseph, his father and his brothers, scene two deals with Joseph's dreams.

<sup>1</sup> Jacob settled in Canaan, the country in which his father had made his home, <sup>2</sup> and this is an account of Jacob's descendants.

When Joseph was a youth of seventeen, he used to accompany his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpa, his father's wives, when they were in charge of the flock, and he told tales about them to their father. <sup>3</sup> Because Joseph was a child of his old age, Israel loved him best of all his sons, and he made him a long robe with sleeves. <sup>4</sup> When his brothers saw that their father loved him best, it aroused their hatred and they had nothing but harsh words for him.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, their hatred of him became still greater. <sup>6</sup> He said to them, "listen to this dream I had. <sup>7</sup> We were out in the field binding sheaves, when all at once my sheaf rose and stood upright, and your sheaves gathered round and bowed in homage before my sheaf". <sup>8</sup> His brothers retorted, "Do you think that you will indeed be king over us and rule us?" and they hated him still more because of his dreams and what he had said. <sup>9</sup> Then he had another dream, which he related to his father and his brothers. "Listen!" he said. "I have had another dream, and in it the sun, the moon, and eleven stars were bowing down to me". <sup>10</sup> When he told his father and his brothers, his father took him to task: "What do you mean by this dream of

yours?” He asked. “Are we to come and bow to the ground before you, me and your mother and your brothers?”<sup>11</sup> His brothers were jealous of him, but his father did not forget the incident.

### **3 The scenes**

The pericope can be divided in two scenes. It starts with an introduction (Gn 37:1–2a). Then continues with the relationship between Joseph, his father and his brothers (Gn 37:2b–4). The second scene focuses on the dreams (Gn 37:5–11).

#### **3.1 Macro scene**

The initial situation starts with an introduction (Gn 37:1–2a) and deals with the two scenes as it is previously related. The main point of these two scenes focuses on the relationship between Joseph and his father. The consequence of this closed relationship will affect his brothers and they will hate Joseph. The dreams come like “oil in the fire” for their hate.

#### **3.2 Micro scene**

In this chapter the scene is presented as it follows:

- Genesis 37:1–2a is the introduction.
- Genesis 37:2b–4 reflects the relationship between Joseph, his father and his brothers.
- Genesis 37:5–11 describes Joseph’s dreams.

##### **3.2.1 Toledoth (vv. 1–2a)**

The main word in the introduction to this chapter is the Hebrew word *toledoth*, which means “generation”. Von Rad defines the word *toledoth* as a “succession of generations” or more precisely “procreations”. It has now acquired the much more general meaning of “family story”, “history of the generation” (Von Rad 1972:350). It is intended to show the importance of Jacob’s family. One can say that this section (Gn 37–50) which reflects the story of Jacob, can be “a key player” as it follows: in verses 2–4, Jacob is present, then seemingly absent in verses 5–9, he finally reappears in verses 10–11.

The *toledoth* which belongs to the Priestly Document (P) and forms a literary bridge introduces the story. It is intended to show the importance of Jacob’s family as “a key player”. It

concludes the story of Jacob and provides an introduction to the Joseph story (Westermann 1996:3). Wilson (2004:51) by referring to Wenham (1994:334–335), Longacre (1989:21), Sailhamer (1992:20) and Green (1996:36) “resumes and completes the *toledoth* of Edom in Genesis 36:1–8”. He thinks also that Genesis 37:1 is a “part of the Joseph narrative, inviting the reader to consider Israel’s people in relation to their position in the land”.

### **3.2.2 The relationship between Joseph and his brothers (vv. 2b–4):**

The first scene relates what the sons of the wives say about their father. Joseph, the favourite son and also the son of the favourite wife Rachel, is seen as a true yet bad reporter. Joseph’s “report has been variously understood as being either true or untrue; malicious, naïve or a model of filial piety; a report or an accusation; unfavourable or evil” (Wilson 2004:55). In this way, Joseph’s report can be viewed as being true but unfavourable towards his brothers, the sons of the wives. His report came like a consequence of being unwise: “The one who guards his mouth preserves his life” (Pr. 13:3). In French, it is said that, *toute verite n’est pas bonne a dire*, literally meaning, “It is not necessary to tell all truth”. “The rumour that Joseph relates to Jacob is merely intended to illustrate the loyal bond between father and son”. Such favouritism, as an injustice can be seen here, although no one can love two children equally (Westermann 1996:3).

Hence, the report is sometimes understood as an accusation: “it cannot be concluded whether the bad report about the sons of the wives was justified or not; nor can Joseph’s role be determined with certainty” (Westermann 1986:36). One can say that Joseph is a good son, not because he is perfect, but because he shows faithfulness to his father in small things. For this, Jacob hopes to give him authority over greater things. Sometimes, as a father, Jacob is unable to determine what has happened between his sons or wives. Therefore, Joseph’s dreams as the main point of the issue will be followed.

### **3.2.3 The dreams (vv. 5–11)**

Dreams in some Old Testament stories represented the means by which God communicated with people. There were two kinds of dreams: in the first, the sleeper sees a connected series of images which correspond to the events in everyday life. In the second, God communicates a

message to the sleeper.

Added to the bad report was Jacob's special love for Joseph which he demonstrated by making him a special robe. This was followed by the main issue, which came as “the oil on the fire”, that is, Joseph's dreams, and his unwise decision to tell his dreams to his family (Gn 37:5–11). The dreams only intensify the hatred that Joseph's brothers feel towards him, indicated by the recurring phrase “they hated him” (Gn 37:4, 5, 8). It seems that his brothers were unable to speak kindly of him (Gn 37:4, 5). They were jealous of him (Gn 37:11).

The dream is also an opportunity for Joseph's brothers to hate him even more (Gn 37:8) and to envy him (Gn 37:11). However his father keeps quiet. He possibly believed that, as a dream it revealed the future (Plaut 1981:245). On the one hand, perhaps, Joseph was compelled to pass on the message, possibly even “under divine constraint”. On the other, it was appropriate or permissible though not obligatory for Joseph to pass it on. But the text is silent. Wenham (1994:39) notes that in verses 9–11, “there is not a word about any communication from God to Joseph in the dream”. He also observes that the latter dreams were interpreted with God's help (Gn 40:8; 41:16, 25, 28), yet there is no mention of God in Genesis 37:5–11. Therefore, the dreams are pictured as “God's hidden way in this narrative” (Wilson 2004:64; Von Rad 1972:351). The dream announces what God intends for Joseph and his brothers. Unfortunately, his brothers and his father disliked his dreams and would not help him. From there, peace shattered in Jacob's family. Culley (1992:157) concludes that “Joseph does achieve a position of authority and his family eventually does come under his direct authority when they arrive in Egypt” and Sailhamer (1992:207) adds “bowing down is a symbol of acknowledging his leadership”. But Joseph is best seen as an interpreter of dreams, when he found himself in Potiphar's house and in prison, then in the presence of Pharaoh (Gn 40–41).

By analysing Joseph's dreams, it seems that the meaning of dreams refers to his brothers and also to his father, because Joseph himself is hinting at them. Although he tries to describe these dreams to his father and brothers, his efforts are to no avail. This study argues that by talking to his brothers and father, he was sharing his dream with them so that they could help him with the interpretation. The problem starts with “Joseph's sheaf rose and stood upright and his

brothers sheaves gathered round and bowed in homage before his sheaf”(Gn 37:7). They possibly tried to interpret this dream in different ways: “Joseph’s brothers will bow down” or “Joseph will rule or reign over them” (Gn 37:8). It would not be easy for them to agree to this.

The second dream is similar to the first. The principal action is “bowing down”. The first refers directly to Joseph’s brothers. It does not directly affect their father. However, the second dream concerns the whole family: father (sun), mother (moon) and eleven stars (eleven brothers). Another issue concerns the mother. Rachel had died before Joseph’s dream, after bearing Benjamin, the twelfth son. Wilson (2004:62) remarks that: “the second dream is not fulfilled in the narrative, but it is probably best not to press the details and symbols too much”. Certainly, “Rachel’s death chronologically precedes the dream (Gn 37:19), and her death is assumed throughout Genesis 37–50, for example in Genesis 43:27; Genesis 48:7”. Hence Gibson (1982:231) argues that “Joseph’s dream of the sun and moon and stars must have been a false one, suggested by his own arrogance and ambition, and not at all by God’s prompting”. Some commentators suggest that “the moon refers to Leah”, because at that time Rachel was dead” (Wilson 2004:62; Gibson 1982:230).

## **4 The characters**

The following characters will be dealt with in a few descriptions of their personality, individual appearance or detailed expositions intended to contribute to the scene and examine the way in which the figures of the narrative are characterised. In this section, the characters will be examined in the triangle (father–Joseph, Joseph–brothers, brothers and father).

### **4.1 The relationship between Joseph and his father**

#### **4.1.1 Jacob**

In order to introduce Jacob as the father in this narrative, it is useful to look at his life when he was young in his own father’s house. Jacob supplanted his brother Esau, first obtaining the birthright of the elder son by taking advantage of his brother’s hunger and then beguiling Isaac (his father) into giving him the blessing which was by custom intended for the first-born.

Eleven sons and a daughter were born to Jacob in Laban’s house during the twenty years that

he stayed there. As a father, Jacob possesses some characteristics which need to be taken into consideration. Among his wives and concubines, his attention and love are focused on Rachel. With regard to his twelve sons, he favours Joseph by making him a special tunic and trusting him more than his other sons. Therefore, as father and responsible for the family, Jacob is supposed to take care of all his sons, by showing his love towards each son and towards their mothers as well. Unfortunately, he does not do this equally, which results in tension between the different sons.

#### **4.1.2 Joseph**

In looking at Genesis 37:2, the character of Joseph seems to be clearly defined. Wilson's (2004:56) view of this verse should be seen as neutral: "that Joseph aligns himself with his father, and even sees this as a prior obligation, although there is no obvious criticism of Joseph's character in verses 2-4". Possibly, as Wilson adds, "the focus is on the reality that Joseph is part of a family characterised by envy and favouritism, and struggle for pre-eminence" (Wilson 2004:56). Although Joseph is classified as 'a tale-bearer', "he merely did his job and reported what he saw" (Plaut 1981:244).

In this regard, the reader initially learns about Joseph's age and occupation, but also gains an initial impression of him as an individual. The biblical narrator primarily draws Joseph's figure by referring to his behaviour, namely that he conveyed an ill report about his brothers to his father. In the case of Genesis 37:2, it is impossible to determine the frequency of Joseph's actions. "The fact that Joseph tells Jacob of the circulating rumours is merely intended to illustrate the loyal bonds between father and son" (Westermann 1996:3). However, the biblical narrator considers it to be a "characteristic" of Joseph. Therefore, the details of these accusations are not provided.

### **4.2 The relationship between Joseph and his brothers**

#### **4.2.1 Joseph**

As has been previously said with regard to Joseph's character, even his attitude towards his brothers seems to be very clearly defined. This thought seems to be justified by Loader (1986:124), when he claims that

... at the outset Joseph is an arrogant young pain in the neck who flouts the rules given in the wisdom sayings. He is a tale-bearer, he does not know when to speak and when to hold his tongue; he stirs up anger by his words; he praises himself. Then his arrogance leads to the ruin spoken in Proverb 18:12 (see Gn 37:2, 5, 7–9; Pr 25:9; 15:1, 23, 27:2).

#### **4.2.2 Joseph's brothers**

Joseph's brothers, because of the way in which Jacob loves Joseph and makes him a special tunic, generally hate him. In this regard, Westermann (1996:5) tries to show that the real problem between Joseph and his brothers began long before his father made him a long robe with sleeves. "The story's conflict is born when the special relationship between Jacob and the child of his old age is expressed in a concrete action" (Westermann 1996:5). The fault lies in the fact that Jacob's special love for Joseph is openly proclaimed in the form of this gift. Westermann (1996:5) continues by arguing that the gift, which acts as a symbol of Jacob's favouritism, "sparks an incident for which everyone, including Jacob, shares some portion of guilt". This gift is, of course, the multi-coloured robe or a "long robe with sleeves", according to the majority of scholars (Westermann 1996:6).

Many authors clearly show how this special love eventually disturbs and threatens the very structure of Jacob's family. Westermann (1996:6-7) suggests that, "it is not Jacob's special love for Joseph in and of itself that sparks this drama, but rather the display of this love. The gift of the robe was an event for witnesses to see".

This event creates an inferiority complex among his relatives. For them, Joseph was indeed *malak*, which means to have dominion over them. The verb *histahawa*, in Hebrew "to bow down" conveys an important meaning in the Israelite context: that "whoever bows down before someone else thereby acknowledges that person as an absolute authority" (Westermann 1996:11). To hate someone is a deed or the inception of a deed. So "the hatred of those who have been slighted is targeted far more vehemently against the favored one than it is against the one who does the favouring, even when the favoured one should not be blamed" (Westermann 1996:8). In this regard, is it appropriate to blame Joseph's brothers for their inception deed?

### **4.3 The relationship between the brothers and their father**

As this study has previously mentioned, the relationship between the brothers and their father reveals the characteristics mentioned above. Jacob, as a father, did not show his sons the love that they expected from him. He focused his love on Joseph, his favourite son. The rumours within the family which cause tension can easily shatter the peace between them. The result of their attitude towards their father and younger brother is indicated in the abovementioned consequences.

## **5 The acts**

The important issue of responsibility starts with the tunic and goes on to the dreams, both of which result in a greater hatred of Joseph (Gen 37:8). Proceeding from this examination of characters, as previously mentioned, it is essential to look at the characters' responsibility, which is a focal point of this study. However, this study's criticism in terms of responsibility will focus on the relationships forming the above which were discussed.

### **5.1 Jacob's responsibility as head of the family**

This section will focus on the responsibility of Jacob as the head of his sons and wives. The first action of Jacob is stated thus: "Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons" (Gn 37:3). It was a similar motif that played an important role in the family of Isaac, where favouritism was shown towards Jacob himself. The latter cannot ignore how this has affected him and his brother Esau, and ultimately his own family. In turn, he shows the most affection towards Rachel's son, Joseph. Is this positive or negative responsibility?

Jacob's second action occurred when he not only loved Joseph from his heart, but in order to prove that he loved him more than his other sons he made a special tunic for him. The Hebrew text, talks about a "robe of ornaments" (*ketonet pas'im*). It is not clear precisely what the tunic was like, but it seems to have been a coat of many colours or a tunic with long sleeves, or one that was richly embroidered (KJV based on LXX and Vulgate, NIV, NEB, NRSV etc). Jacob's affection for Joseph most likely sprang from his love for Rachel, whose first-born son Joseph was. Some authors have suggested that this robe was a royal robe, richly ornamented, and that it seemed be a long robe, reaching to the ankles. Possibly Jacob was appointing Joseph as his



heir. The expression used to describe the robe or tunic is only mentioned in 2 Samuel 13:18–19. Hence, the robe is “a visible sign of his exalted position” (Coats 1976:12).

## **5.2 The responsibility of Joseph towards his father**

There is no doubt that this section sets Joseph apart as the most favoured son. Joseph evidently now enjoyed the kind of relationship with his father that the others did not have. This suggests that “Joseph became the chosen son of the promise”, and “the robe is an important detail in this regard” (Wilson 2004:57; Fretheim 1994:598; Plaut 1981:244). In this section, Joseph is supposed to obey his father in all matters, whether right or wrong. Therefore, the consequence of his act has already been consumed by the result mentioned above. It is not easy for someone if he/she always wants to tell the truth.

## **5.3 The responsibility of Joseph towards his brothers**

Joseph should have paid attention to his actions in general. It is not easy to live in a family with so many children where only one is truly loved. His attitude towards his brothers does not reflect responsibility. If he was a man who loved his brothers, he should have reproached his brothers with a sweet tongue and respect, as their younger brother. Even if his brothers were not able to stand this, it would have been better than being a tale-bearer (Gn 37:2; Pr 25:9). Therefore, Joseph's behaviour towards his brothers was irresponsible. In any event, the consequences of his actions have already been consumed by the result mentioned above.

## **5.4 The responsibility of the brothers towards their father**

Children are supposed to obey their parents, something which is an important commandment within the laws of God. The brothers were supposed to accept their father, even if he behaved unjustly towards them. They were not allowed to suspect their father of wrong actions or say anything wrong to him, because this would go against Israelite customs. It would have been better for them to talk to their father, and explain to him what he was doing by favouring their younger brother and forgetting about them, since they were also his sons. They should not have hated their brother Joseph, who was their own brother, and they all had the same father. The relationship between Jacob and his sons is something which draws one's attention. Was it permissible for his sons to complain about something by speaking truthfully? What were their

boundaries?

Being older than Joseph, they also had the responsibility of reproaching and guiding their young brother if he did something wrong, rather than hating him. In attempting to follow their behaviour towards Joseph, the author identifies three important verbs which have negative connotations in this regard. The first action starts with the verb *sheno*, which in Hebrew means hate. This verb is used three times in this section, followed by the expression “could not speak to him peaceably” or “harsh words for him” (Gn 37:4). The second action is the same verb “hate”, but “even more” or “their hatred of him became still greater” (Gn 37:5, 8). The two actions suggest that there is literally an absence of *shalom*, which means “peace” in Hebrew, and which is an important part of the Israelite community. The third action starts with another verb *kaneh*, which in Hebrew means “were jealous”. The consequence of this situation can be expressed by the Hebrew verb *ragaz*, which means “were anguished, were stirred or agitated” (Alcalay 1990:2399). All these expressions denote an evil action. Indeed, the situation stirred them deeply, even causing them great anguish. Before this action, Joseph’s father had taken him to task, perhaps because the last dream affected him and his wife.

Even the first action with the verb “hate” seems to suggest a situation which is very dangerous. The meaning of the verb “hate” is to feel extreme enmity or aversion towards somebody. The noun “hate” explains intense hostility or dislike (Allen 2004:640). If one tries to analyse the two expressions, “extreme enmity” and “intense hostility”, expressionist would indicate that they could not speak to him peaceably and, even more, they indicate something that is not far from death, and these expressions should not be used with regard to brothers sharing the same blood.

The third action starts, as previously mentioned, with the expression “were jealous”, which means apprehensive and suspicious of rivalry or resentful and envious of an advantage or possession that somebody else has or is believed to have (Allen 2004:751). In examining these expressions, it seems that their own problem is clearly identified. They hate Joseph because he is a tale-bearer, and they are jealous because of his special tunic. These two fundamental things put Joseph in a critical position between life and death. Who will be the arbitrator of this

familial conflict?

### **5.5 Jacob's responsibility towards his sons**

The sons' fear and respect for their father is a wisdom motif. However, the brothers have their own reasons for disliking their father. These reasons are, as previously mentioned, because their father loves Joseph more than them; because he made a special robe for Joseph; and also because Joseph had dreams and talked about them. In fact, the main problem resulted in the three actions. The two dreams meant something to them, especially the way in which he talked about them, and it would have seemed to them that one day they would become Joseph's slaves. Where does the idea come from that they should say bad things about their father? This kind of situation is unheard of in the Israelite community. It would seem as if this idea stems from the sons of maids, who express negative statements about their father. However, the text seems quiet in this regard (Gn 37:2), and even the relationship between mistresses and their maidservants in this narrative is not elaborated on in the text. It can be said that Jacob's sons' actions will cause them bad memories throughout their lives. These actions are the consequence of their irresponsibility.

There is something important that needs to be mentioned here in terms of Jacob's relationship with all his sons. By referring to the relationship between Jacob and his child born in his old age, Westermann (1996:4-5) argues that, "while we might see this favouritism as an injustice, the old Israelites would reply that no one can love two children equally".

It seems, according to Westermann (1996:5) that this story is trying to show us that the relationship between a parent and a child can be unique and simply the result of a unique situation, when he says that Jacob "loved Joseph more than any other children". This comparison is merely an approximation of the truth. In fact, this kind of favouritism is not, according to Westermann (1996:5), an "intensification of love, but an indicator of a relationship between two people whose special nature cannot be expressed adequately in words". He further argues that "the storyteller's perspective of Jacob's favouritism is utterly free of criticism ... Jacob's preference for Joseph is simply a matter of fact, and should not be seen here as a fault" (Westermann 1996:5). This study is in total agreement with him. Experience has shown that

most favouritism of this nature shatters a family, either before or after the death of the father. The favourite child will suffer a lot after the death of his father, if his father did not take some precautions in order to protect him. Jacob himself experiences frustration because of his brother Esau (Gn 25:27–34; 27:1–46).

The giving of the gift “a special robe” was not wrong, since love, by its very nature, always seeks to express itself in correct actions. This study’s question is this: By doing this only for Joseph, what did Jacob think about his other children? Is it right for a father to only focus on one child? He is also supposed to give his other children attention as well. Indeed, there is no doubt that Jacob himself is the one who has shattered the peace in his family. With reference to the African context, of which the author has experience, this point of view is legitimate, if not debatable. This kind of behaviour is irresponsible of Jacob as head of the family.

It is essential for Jacob to be wise and responsible in this kind of situation. As a responsible person, all situations need to be taken seriously and carefully considered. The consequences of Jacob’s actions will simply cause damage and shatter the family, and this will affect Jacob himself. Jacob's irresponsibility needs to be carefully observed. As some scholars have previously mentioned, “Jacob's favouritism is utterly free of criticism” (Westermann 1996:5), but wisdom would advise prudence. However, the fact that Jacob keeps the matter in mind shows his maturity and wisdom. It is also the centre of his responsibility. Jacob believes that his dreams will reveal the future. In fact, as a father, he takes Joseph to task, but he does not hate him or is even jealous of him, as are his other sons. This is obviously a responsible attitude.

## **6 Summary**

In this section of the Joseph narrative, the researcher has attempted to show where responsibility and irresponsibility lie. It is very important to reveal in this section that the characters need to be taken in consideration, as was mentioned above. Jacob possesses some characteristics in terms of the equal way he should have shown love towards his family. As a father, he did not show the love to his sons that they expected from him but focused his love on Joseph only. It can be said that Jacob is the factor that shattered the peace between the brothers. The results of Jacob’s sons’ attitude are indicated in the abovementioned consequences.

In other ways, Joseph aligns himself with his father even though there is no obvious criticism of Joseph's character in verses 2–4. In any event, Joseph is still a “tale-bearer” as far as his brothers are concerned, because he is, as reported, arrogant, unable to hold his tongue and he praises himself. For this reason, he was hated by his brothers, and this is brought on by Jacob's special love for Joseph and his gift of the multi-coloured robe. It was said that this robe “was a royal robe, richly ornamented, and that it was a long robe, reaching to the ankles. This gift was an event for witnesses to see” (Westermann 1996:7) and “a visible sign of his exalted position” (Coats 1976:12). The second important element is Joseph's dreams, which were reported to his brothers and father. The content of the dreams confirmed that Joseph would have dominion over them and they would bow down before him; it would have been impossible for Israel to bow down before someone else.

Therefore, the issue of responsibility starts with the tunic and goes on to the dreams, both of which resulted in a greater hatred of Joseph (Gen 37:8). These suggestions were enough to cause conflict between Joseph and his brothers and towards their father. Joseph's action in bringing reports to his father does not reflect responsibility towards his brothers. In any event, the consequences of his actions have already been consumed by the result mentioned above.

The brothers were supposed to accept their father, even if he behaved unjustly towards them, otherwise it would be contrary to Israelite customs. The fear and respect of their father is a wisdom motif and no reason for disliking their father. Their act engages irresponsible actions towards Joseph himself. In fact, hating their brother was not a solution for children from the same father. As they were older than Joseph, they also had the responsibility of reproaching and guiding their young brother if he did something wrong, rather than hating him. Those expressions “harsh words for him”, “even more”, “their hatred of him became still greater”, “were jealous”, “were anguished, were stirred or agitated” (Gn 37:4, 5, 8) show that peace was missing in this family and denote an evil action. This indicates something not far from death, and these expressions should not be used in the context of brothers sharing the same blood.

As I previously mentioned, it seems that the brothers' problem is clearly identified by the fact that Joseph is a tale-bearer, and they were jealous of his special tunic. These two fundamental

issues put Joseph in a critical situation between life and death. It can be said that Jacob's sons' actions would result in bad memories for them throughout their lives and were the consequence of their irresponsibility. The experiences reveal that most favouritism of this nature causes damage within a family and would affect the favourite for his entire life if the father did not take some precautions before his death. It would be better for us to advise prudence in such cases. This initial situation will be dealt with in the next chapter, which will focus on the complication.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **THE COMPLICATION (Gn 37:12–36)**

#### **1 Introduction**

This section is the most important one in the Joseph narrative. It starts with the pericope, which helps the reader to understand the context. It then deals with the dramatic tension between Joseph and his brothers, and between Joseph's brothers and their father. It reveals the consequences of the initial situation. When reading this section, one becomes aware of conflict between members of the family, even if this was not Jacob's intention. Thus, there was even a misunderstanding between the brothers, although the final result is Joseph's deeply moving situation as he was no longer a member of the family, and Jacob's great anguish and mourning when he loses his beloved son. Why is this section called the "complication"? This question requires us to learn more about the characters and acts revealed in the initial situation which seem very complicated in the storyline. This whole concept will be developed in this section.

The scene will deal with Genesis 37:12–36. The character of each person mentioned in this text will also be considered, and the acts which indicate responsibility will be discussed. Thereafter, the characters and acts which reflect responsibility or irresponsibility will be focused on and discussed in terms of the triangular scheme (Joseph and his father, Joseph and his brothers, and the brothers and their father). Finally, a summary will end this chapter.

#### **2 Pericope**

<sup>12</sup> Joseph's brothers had gone to herd their father's flocks at Shechem. <sup>13</sup> Israel said to him, "Your brothers are herding the flocks at Shechem; I am going to send you to them". Joseph answered, "I am ready to go". <sup>14</sup> Israel told him to go and see if all was well with his brothers and the flocks, and to bring back word to him. So Joseph was sent off from the vale of Hebron and came to Shechem, where <sup>15</sup> a man met him wandering in the open country and asked him what he was looking for. <sup>16</sup> "I am looking for my brothers", he replied. "Can you tell me where they are herding the flocks?" <sup>17</sup> The man said, "They have moved from there; I heard them speak of going to Dothan". Joseph went after his brothers and came up with them at Dothan. <sup>18</sup> They saw him in the distance, and before he reached them, they plotted to kill him. <sup>19</sup> "Here comes that dreamer", they said to one another. <sup>20</sup> "Now is our chance; let us kill him and throw him into one of these cisterns; we can say that a wild beast has devoured him. Then we shall see what becomes of his dreams". <sup>21</sup> When Reuben heard, he came to his rescue, urging them not to

take his life.<sup>22</sup> “Let us have no bloodshed”, he said. “Throw him into this cistern in the wilderness, but do him no injury”. Reuben meant to rescue him from their clutches in order to restore him to his father.<sup>23</sup> When Joseph reached his brothers, they stripped him of the long robe with sleeves which he was wearing,<sup>24</sup> picked him up, and threw him into the cistern. It was empty, with no water in it.<sup>25</sup> They had sat down to eat when, looking up, they saw an Ishmaelite caravan coming from Gilead on the way down to Egypt, with camels carrying gum tragacanth and balm and myrrh.<sup>26</sup> Judah said to his brothers, “What do we gain by killing our brother and concealing his death?”<sup>27</sup> Why not sell him to these Ishmaelite? Let us do him no harm, for after all, he is our brother, our own flesh and blood”; his brothers agreed.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile some passing Midianite merchants drew Joseph up out of the cistern and sold him for twenty pieces of silver to the Ishmaelite; they brought Joseph to Egypt.<sup>29</sup> When Reuben came back to the cistern, he found Joseph had gone. He tore his clothes<sup>30</sup> and going to his brothers he said, “The boy is not there. Whatever shall I do?”

<sup>31</sup> Joseph's brothers took the long robe with sleeves, and dipped it in the blood of a goat which they had killed.<sup>32</sup> After tearing the robe, they brought it to their father and said, “Look what we have found. Do you recognize it? Is this your son's robe or not?”<sup>33</sup> Jacob recognized it. “It is my son's,” he said. “A wild beast has devoured him. Joseph has been torn to pieces”.<sup>34</sup> Jacob tore his clothes; he put on sackcloth and for many days he mourned his son.<sup>35</sup> Though his son and daughters all tried to comfort him, he refused to be comforted. He said, “No, I shall go to Sheol mourning for my son”. Thus Joseph's father wept for him.<sup>36</sup> The Midianites meanwhile had sold Joseph in Egypt to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's court officials, the captain of the guard.

### **3 The scenes**

#### **3.1 The macro scene**

Jacob decides to find out about his sons, who are herding the flock far from Hebron. The only emissary who will go to check on the well-being of his sons at Shechem is his beloved son, Joseph. However, Jacob did not recognise the imminent danger: the distance to be covered by the young boy from Hebron to Shechem, and the suspicious and antagonistic relationship between Joseph and his brothers.

However, the scene will show the evil attitude of Joseph's brothers when he reached them, and their character, together with their acts, will show that they had meditated on or nurtured their hatred of him for a long time. Indeed, Joseph will find himself in the pit, being sold and then brought to Egypt. The dramatic action will be in the hands of his brothers. Their irresponsibility is shown by Reuben tearing his clothes, after which the brothers dip the long robe with sleeves in the blood of the goat which they had killed, telling a pack of lies to their father and making



him believe that Joseph is no longer alive. These premeditated actions are evil ones. Thereafter, the scene will deal with the complication of the situation and the concealment of their deed. This deed will inevitably affect Jacob, as shown by his immense grief, anguish and mourning, after which Joseph's new life in Potiphar's house in Egypt begins. The details of this last part will be provided in the next chapter of this study.

### **3.2 The micro scene**

The section of Genesis 37:12–36 can be divided into four sections:

Genesis 37:12–17 the father's initiative to send Joseph to his brothers.

Genesis 37:18–22 the brothers' strategic attack.

Genesis 37:23–30 Joseph's predicament as a result of his brothers' deed.

Genesis 37:31–36 the concealment of the deed and the father's grief.

#### **3.2.1 Jacob's initiative in sending Joseph to look for his brothers (Gn 37:12–17)**

This section is presented as a follow-up to the previous pericope. It serves to set a new stage for Joseph. In sending Joseph to Shechem to check on the welfare of his brothers and of the flocks, Jacob's action "denotes wholeness, well-being, and a certain kind of inquiry as to how things are going" (Westermann 1996:11). It is evident that Jacob is thinking about his sons who are far away from him. Therefore, he decides to find out about them, and Joseph seems to be the best person to go and find his brothers, who are busy grazing the flock. Joseph does not hesitate to respond to his father's request to go and check on the well-being of his brothers and the flock. However, he does not recognise the imminent danger. Shechem, where Jacob's sons have gone to graze the flock, is about 80 kilometres from Hebron, where Jacob lives. Joseph is supposed to find this place and report back to his father on the well-being of the flocks and his brothers. This is a responsibility for Joseph, as a reliable emissary whom Jacob trusts.

After travelling a long distance, and even though he did not find them in Shechem, the young boy (Joseph), who was already very tired, continued on his journey to Dothan, in order to carry out his father's wish. Even though Joseph was going to his brothers in peace, they unfortunately regarded him as a spy sent by their father.

### **3.2.2 Joseph's brothers' strategic attack (Gn 37:18–22)**

This section opens with Joseph's brothers' deed. Their strategic attack was so fierce and fast, like a lion lying in wait for its prey. In the course of events, Joseph found himself in the pit. A pit is basically a deep hole in the ground, either natural or artificial. However, the word "pit" has many meanings in Hebrew. The first word is *bor*, which means a deep hole and is used to describe the place into which Joseph was cast by his brethren (Gn 37:20–24). It can also mean a place to hide (1Sm 13:6), the place where lions lurk (2Sm 23:20; 1Chron 11:22), a place where prisoners are confined (Is 24:22; Zach 9:11 cf Jr 38:6), and into which the rebel Ishmael cast the bodies of the men of Shechem, Shiloh and Samaria (Jr 41:7). It is also a place where water is collected (Is 30:14; Jr 14:3), or a hole for trapping animals (2Sm 17:9; 18:17; Is 24:17–18; Jr 48:43–44). Indeed, a pit is dangerous. Joseph, a spoilt child, finds himself in such a place. His brothers' attitude is not friendly when they strip him, put him into the pit and callously "sit down for lunch" (Von Rad 1972:354; Kselmann 1988:113), with no conscience about their act or pity for their younger brother. They decide to kill Joseph; however, Reuben, as the elder brother, proposes that they keep him in the pit, intending to find a way of returning Joseph to Jacob.

### **3.2.3 Joseph's predicament as a result of his brothers' deed (Gn 37:23–30)**

The first action of Joseph's brothers when they reach him is to strip the robe from his body, "the symbol of the favouritism which has provoked their wrath" (Westermann 1996:14) and put him in the pit, without thinking about the long distance travelled by their brother in order to find them. The narrator does not allow Joseph to speak. He is clearly overwhelmed by the intense situation. Even if the narrator controls the discussion, one can see in Joseph's silence the main focus of his responsibility. After the suddenness of their deed, the brothers sit down to eat a meal, and they notice a caravan of merchant Ishmaelites, who were travelling to Egypt with their goods.

The Ishmaelite caravan is making its way from Gilead to Egypt, and it is known that the caravan route actually passed Dothan (Westerman 1996:15). Joseph was finally sold in Egypt. However, the brothers are concerned to protect their legitimate right.

### 3.2.4 Who are those who sold Joseph?

Before examining the context, it would be interesting to learn about the Midianites and Ishmaelites. It seems that they are the same people, but the context in which the text was written shows that the “Midianites” sold Joseph, while the source J merely says that he who bought Joseph from the “Ismaelites” was an Egyptian man. In this source J, “Joseph is first sold to a private Egyptian, then cast into the state prison in the way here narrated when he gained the confidence of the unnamed governor, so that when the butler and the baker are sent thither they naturally fall under his charge” (Skinner 1994:456). In E, Joseph is sold at once to Potiphar (Gn 37:36), the palace officer in whose house the butler and the baker are afterwards confined (Gn 40:8); and Joseph without being himself a prisoner, is told to wait on these eminent persons (Gn 40:4). The imprisonment, therefore, is indispensable in J, and at least embarrassing in E (Skinner 1994:456). The second section “some passing Midianite merchants drew Joseph up out of the cistern” is from source E. But the third section “and sold him ... to the Ishmaelite” is from source J. Then the last “they brought Joseph to Egypt” is from source E.

There sometimes seems to be a misunderstanding between scholars. According to Jacob, Joseph was sold by the Midianites. They were traders who passed through the land as buyers, not like the Ishmaelite merchants, who were involved in foreign commerce. In his view, the “Midianites passed the cistern and drew up Joseph, as they were probably attracted by his cries, and finally sold Joseph to the Ismaelites, who, equipped with camels and prepared for such trading trips, took Joseph to Egypt” (Jacob 1974:255).

By looking carefully at the word “Ishmaelite” and “Midianite”, it seems really difficult to tell the difference between them. But the contexts in which the Ishmaelites and Midianites are mentioned are hardly in accord with at least the literal sense of the representation, according to which both would be Joseph’s cousins if the context refers to Genesis 21 and 24:2. Another element to which to turn our attention is that the “Midianite traders, passing by, kidnap Joseph, and carry him away into Egypt” (Westermann 1987:324–325; Jacob 1974:255). This means that Joseph was not “sold” but “stolen away” out of the land of the Hebrews. In fact, the Midianite drew Joseph up out of the cistern without his brothers’ knowledge (which explains Reuben’s surprise in verse 29) while they were at their meal. This argument seems very

plausible and credible, because the text itself refers to Reuben's surprise. According to the source J, those who sold Joseph were the Ishmaelites.

.

### **3.2.5 The concealment of the deed and Jacob's grief (Gn 37:31–36).**

In Egypt, the Midianites sold Joseph to Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's officials and the captain of the guard (Gn 37:36). Thereafter, Joseph's brothers sent his blood-stained robe to Jacob. When Jacob saw the bloodstained robe, he responded in the following manner: "Joseph has been torn to pieces" (Gn 37:33), and tore his garment in mourning (Gn 37:34). His mourning really signifies that he has lost his heir. The blood covering the robe is "the traces of the crime" (Plaut 1981:246).

The scene also highlights the growing tension between Jacob and his sons. Reuben, as the elder brother, does not know how to explain this situation to his father. "Now, whatever shall I do?" (Gn 37:30). The complication in the structure of the Joseph story reverses the role of the principals, as shown in the way that Joseph's brothers experience guilt. Their anxiety is grounded in reality, because they know what they have done to their brother, and that this affects their father. In any event, the brothers' deed is revealed through their characters and responsibility.

## **4 The characters**

The characters will be dealt with in this section by means of a few descriptions of their personalities, and will then be examined within the triangle of relationships: father–Joseph, Joseph–brothers, and brothers–father. As previously mentioned, detailed expositions of their inner lives and the high points of their characters will be examined in the narrative.

### **4.1 The relationship between Joseph and his father**

#### **4.1.1 Jacob**

As a father, Jacob sent his son Joseph to look for his brothers in order to enquire about their well-being. He felt that his sons should be united with one another. The risk that Jacob was taking was perhaps intended to test him: what should be done if I send you to them to Shechem? I know that is asking a great deal of you. In the view of this study, Jacob possesses

some characteristics which need to be carefully taken into consideration. This study attempts to analyse how Jacob was feeling after the last time that Joseph had talked to them about his dreams. It is not the establishment of peace, however, that Jacob was expecting from his sons. The words “bring back a report” signify a kind of tragedy, whereby a person can unsuspectingly say something without knowing what the future meaning of their words is (Jacob 1974:252). “From the valley of Hebron” this land is very significant to the history of the people of Israel. This was the place where Abraham, Joseph’s ancestor, was buried (Gn 23:19; 25:9–10). This land is the land from which Jacob will send Joseph to seek peace with his brothers. Jacob appears to be the kind of father who tries to pacify everyone around him, but the fact that he keeps all these acts in the back of his mind reveals his character.

#### **4.1.2 Joseph**

Joseph’s character is shown in terms of him being the one who brings a bad report (Gn 37:2). He is qualified as a tale-bearer, and is suspected of being someone who discloses a secret. For some time, he has been seen as the one who does not know how to hold his tongue, and speaks too fast in praising himself (Gn 37:5, 7–9). These things have a negative effect on Joseph’s character, even if he is seen to be a good person.

By complying with his father’s request, it can be said that Joseph has gone against his own will. However, bringing a “bad” report is not seen in terms of his father’s will. In this regard, his father repeats the same words by saying: “bring me back word” (Gn 37:14b). Jacob is aware of Joseph’s ability and determination to attend to his request. He is the one who has a good character as evidenced by his courteous and kind attitude towards the man he meets in Shechem: “Can you tell me where they are herding the flock?” (Gn 37:16) is proof of his character. His character is further revealed through his interaction with his brothers when he finds them in Dothan. The answer given by the man is a confirmation of his good character: “they have moved from there; I heard them speak of going to Dothan” (Gn 37:17).

### **4.2 The relationship between Joseph and his brothers**

#### **4.2.1 Joseph**

Joseph does not hesitate to respond to his father’s request to go and check on the well-being of

his brothers and the flock. However, he does not recognise the imminent danger. This also reveals his immaturity. The fact that Joseph is committed to finding this place and bringing a report back to his father concerning the well-being of the flock and his brothers reveals two aspects of his character. Firstly, he wants to prove his reputation as a reliable emissary whom Jacob can trust. Secondly, as a proud boy, he wants to improve his brothers' relationship with their father, even if he does not find them in Shechem.

#### **4.2.2 Joseph's brothers**

Joseph's brothers' deed is deeply disturbing. It is not a situation which is supposed to occur between brothers from the same family, and even the same father. It seems so aggressive and criminal. Can one call it sibling rivalry or familial conflict? It is really beyond human understanding, but is nevertheless the reality. Westermann (1996:12), in analysing this sad situation between brothers in this context, argues that "therefore, rivalry between maturing brothers is seen in the Old Testament as quite natural ... conflict between brothers is understood to be so normal and so forgivable that the conflict in and of itself usually does not even get in the way of a healthy relationship between siblings".

The two expressions which occur in verse 20: "now is our chance" and "let us kill him and throw him" (Gn 37:20) are very strange. The expression "now is our chance" was added. In Hebrew, this expression literally means "so now" or "now then". It seems plausible to agree with the translation "now is our chance". If one considers the context, Joseph's brothers were looking for an opportunity to act on their dislike of their brother. It can be said that this is really the opportunity that they have long been waiting for, and now they have it.

Therefore, the second expression, "let us kill him and throw him" is inclusive. It engages all Joseph's brothers in the deed (Gn 37:20–22), however, "Reuben as the eldest, felt some responsibility to try to save Joseph" (Ryrie 1995:64). The expression "let us" implies that even when refusing to take part in the action, he had not left their circle. Westermann (1996:13) argues that "the brothers are concerned to protect their legitimate right", even though Reuben seems to be the one who distances himself from the murder plot at the very outset: "let us not take his life" (Gn 37:21). This is mitigated by the fact that he does not openly oppose his

brothers. There is evidently agreement on a single plan of action, and Reuben has kept secret his opposition to the murder, as well as his intention to save his brother (Westermann 1996:14). This clearly reveals their character. It could, however, be said here that the same kind of character cannot be applicable to all the brothers. One can find some exceptions in this regard. Reuben and Judah have a conciliatory nature, although this is not clearly revealed. However, their opposition to murder is shown clearly.

### **4.3 The relationship between brothers and their father**

#### **4.3.1 The father**

As a father, Jacob's character is not clearly shown with regard to his relationship with his sons. It seems as if he does not love his other sons, because of the way in which he focuses his love only on Joseph. Knowing the character of his sons well, Jacob tries to test them, and this was not guaranteed to work. He is supposed to reconcile and advise them as a father about Joseph's dreams and other misunderstandings observed at that time before they depart for Shechem. In this section, the text seems quiet in terms of the kind of relationship that exists between Jacob and his sons. However, his silence and his attitude towards his sons, even though not clearly revealed here, will be explained at the end of the story.

#### **4.3.2 Joseph's brothers**

The main issue that puts Jacob's sons in an awkward position is the fact that Jacob himself does not consider them as his own sons, even if the narrator does not discuss this. Two factors reveal this situation: firstly, the fact that Joseph might bring back a bad report concerning his brothers, and secondly, that their father loves Joseph more than them, and treats him as a blue-eyed boy. The complication in this section starts with an ironic idea: "Behold, Mister Dreamer is coming" then "we shall see what will become of his dreams" (Gn 37:19–20). It is extremely important to understand that if sin is consumed by the heart, it gives birth to death. The expression "Mister Dreamer" is used ironically by his brothers to show their envy. This point must be the principal aim of all the complication in this section. In fact, Joseph's brothers are full of evil, and their strategy is credible and true.

Reuben, as the first-born son of Jacob by Leah (Gn 29:32), occupies an important place in the

Joseph narrative. Some admirable qualities in his character have unfortunately been offset by his incestuous act with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Gn 35:22). The act in which Reuben advises his brothers not to kill Joseph, and returns to the pit to release him is extremely important (Gn 37:21, 29). This is because "lay no hand on him characterizes even the beginning of it as a despicable action of violence" (Jacob 1974:253). In this study's view, Reuben spared no effort to prevent this. The question to be asked is: How he can save his brother, and with what authority? Would this not again cause conflict between him and his brothers? The decision to put Joseph in the pit was made by consensus. Judah, the fourth son of Jacob by Leah (Gn 29:35) takes the lead early on among his brothers, as is shown in the story of Joseph (Gn 37:26–27). Judah's character will be clearly revealed in Genesis 38.

## **5 The acts**

### **5.1 The responsibility of Joseph and his father**

#### **5.1.1 Joseph**

As a young Israelite who should know the wisdom instructions, Joseph is supposed to obey his father in all matters, right or wrong. His response is "*hineni*", literally meaning "here I". The word "*hineni*" is a positive response. It means "I am present" or "I am available to do what you want me to do". The respect he has for his father is important, since the latter will then see that Joseph wants to obey him. This means, in fact, courage, ability and availability to take on a mission. His response to his father in verse 13b, "here I am", is arguably one of submission (Leibowitz 1976:477; Wilson 2004:68). "It may simply be a conventional or polite response" (Wilson 2004:69). Joseph, in respecting the will of his father, does not intend to deceive him.

Another important point is Joseph's sense of responsibility. After travelling a long distance and becoming very tired, Joseph is not sure where he is going and wanders around the countryside, trying to find his way, until someone finally asks him who he is looking for. "This small episode demonstrates just how lost and helpless Joseph is in the domain of his brothers" (Westermann 1996:11). Unfortunately, Joseph does not find his brothers in Shechem. It would have then been acceptable for Joseph to return to his father, since Dothan was far from Shechem, around 20 kilometres away (Gn 37:17). Joseph neither thinks about being tired, nor is worried about what might occur between him and his brothers. Furthermore, Joseph is



determined to carry out his father's wishes, not merely his command. In fact, Joseph's determination to look for his brothers in the fields (Gn 37:15-17) and go on to Dothan, shows that Joseph is determined to meet his father's intention, not merely his command (Licht 1978:48-49).

Therefore, although Joseph is going to his brothers in peace, they regard him as a spy sent by their father, which is why they hate him so much. They do not consider how much he has struggled to find them. They try to condemn him because of his attitude towards them: "Here comes that dreamer" (Gn 37:19). Nevertheless, he still completes his mission. Joseph's responsibility in this section appears to be very important. He does not leave the task given to him by his father. Most young people like him cannot manage a difficult mission such as this. When he first failed to find his brothers at Shechem, it would have been reasonable for him to go back to his father. It can be said in this case that Joseph did not consider his age in terms of the mission, but rather accepted the responsibility, even though the mission was very risky. He is an example of a responsible young person. There is no age for responsibility. His being sold into Egypt does not mean that the mission has failed, but is rather a sign of bravery. His responsibility demanded sacrifice and perseverance, even at the cost of his own life.

### **5.1.2 Jacob**

Jacob's decision to send Joseph to his brothers involves two issues: firstly, as a good and responsible man, he appoints Joseph as a messenger to his brothers. As a father, it was his responsibility to obtain information about his sons and the well-being of their flock. According to him, Joseph seems to be a reliable emissary, one whom he trusts will bring back a report. The second issue is not really responsibility but risk, which is on two levels: firstly, the long distance, with the probability of wild beasts, that Joseph is supposed to travel. Jacob does not recognise the imminent danger involved in the young man travelling so far. The second is the relationship between Joseph and his brothers. Jacob cannot ignore these facts. He then takes the decision to send Joseph "to go and see if all was well with his brothers and the flocks, and to bring back word to him" (Gn 37:14). The fact that Jacob might not know that there is tension growing between his beloved Joseph and his brothers, occasioned of course by Jacob himself, seems to be highly unlikely. Therefore, one can say that Jacob's attitude is irresponsible, even

risky. These issues have persuaded the author that Jacob is negligent here, which results in his irresponsible actions.

## **5.2 The responsibility of Joseph and his brothers**

### **5.2.1 Joseph**

Unfortunately, Joseph's mission to find his brothers will not be easy. This will be clearly shown in the actions of his brothers towards him which follow. The consequences of these actions will be clear at the end of this act, and they will affect Jacob himself (Gn 37:33–35). His sons will not bring back Joseph, his beloved son, but his tunic, as proof of his death. Joseph's responsibility is revealed in his attitude when he is attacked – he does not do anything.

### **5.2.2 The brothers**

In verse 18, when they contemplate killing Joseph, Westermann (1996:13) finds this to be like “the murderous design of a group of people, comparable to the premeditation of murder by an individual, and not merely a crime that springs from the heat of their anger”. Is it possible to understand the brothers' willingness to agree on something like this? As some scholars argue, “every act of murder seeks to eliminate not only a human being, but also some sort of impediment in the murderer's path, and most murder motives tend to be based on jealousy or covetousness”. Here, Joseph's brothers struggle against their father's favourite, and are unable to attack the injustice itself at its source. They are focused on their wicked acts against Joseph, their brother. Their crime is born out of mistrust (Westermann 1996:13), which is also linked to his dreams, which seem to hinder their future happiness.

Judah appears in this case to warn his brothers about the consequences of their plot. Therefore, as the narrator suggests, the deed and its consequences are apparent to all the brothers from the very beginning (Westermann 1996:15). Judah prefers to make a profit by persuading his brothers to sell Joseph, rather than to kill him (vv. 26–28). Judah emerges as an effective leader, in that his proposal carries the day (vv. 26–27), although his plan is motivated more by money (v. 28) “than any brotherly affection” (Wilson 2004:73). However, they only start out with the deed itself in mind and forget about the consequences. The intervening brother therefore has to point this out: “What do we gain by killing our brother and concealing his

death?” (v.26). The key words which make Judah different from his brothers are “our brother”, who came to “turn upside down their act” – even it was view in term of profit. Judah's words serve to remind his brothers about the consequences that will occur if they commit this deed.

### **5.3 The responsibility of the brothers and their father**

#### **5.3.1 The father**

Jacob’s action of sending Joseph to find his brothers, necessitates the latter’s availability, as well as his responsibility, to attend to this request. However, “welfare”, which refers to peace, means basically, completeness, soundness or well-being. In this particular context, Jacob wants to know if there is harmony and concord between his sons and their flock and whether they are all safe, as they are far away from him. “Joseph is to leave the place of safety (with Jacob) and travel to the place of risk and uncertainty (with the brothers)” (Wilson 2004:67; Humphreys 1988:69; Coats 1976:15).

When he recognises the tunic, dipped in blood, Jacob is faced with “a great psychological truth, and this has a traumatic effect” on him (Jacob 1974:256). He does not want to think or ask more about it. He just repeats the words of the others. Unfortunately, the unhappy father collapses at the heartbreaking thought that his beloved Joseph has been torn to pieces by wild beasts. He spends the rest of his time on the ground, in order to observe the custom of mourning for the dead until his own death. He does not allow himself to be comforted by his sons and daughters.

In this regard, this study suggests that the time here is not for mourning, but rather to think about his responsibility. In truth, Jacob was not very fair to the rest of his sons. His feelings towards his sons were not trustworthy and credible as the father of many children. The author is not pronouncing judgement, but rather trying to clarify the position of Jacob as a father and the man responsible for his family. In this study’s view, there are two kinds of mourning: obligatory mourning, which is not expected by anyone, and which comes as a surprise. The other kind is occasional mourning. This is mourning that takes place when someone knows about a death before it happens. It emphasises the fact that the consequence and the purpose of actions will be achieved. This is not to say that Jacob knew that his son would be killed by his

brothers. However, he did know something about the widespread rumours concerning his sons and Joseph.

In any event, he could not do anything – this fact is accepted sadly. It would be best for Jacob to review his responsibility as a father towards his sons, and as a husband towards his wives. The text, however, seems to be quiet concerning the conflict between his wives. This situation can be seen as a lesson to be learnt about responsibility and irresponsibility.

### **5.3.2 The brothers**

Joseph's brothers decide to avoid the guilt of actual bloodshed by selling Joseph to the merchants for a considerable amount of money: twenty pieces of silver, which refers to the price for a five- to twenty-year-old male (Lv 27:5). Something very significant is that, by common agreement, they take heed of Judah's alternative plan: "his brothers agreed" (v.27b), when he makes the suggestion to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite (keeper or driver of camels), rather than to kill him, because he is their brother. This was a responsible attitude but also a risky one, which might lead to a schism. However, they would not be able to conceal their brother's blood if they killed him. Therefore, "the Midianites passed the cistern and drew up Joseph, as they were probably attracted by his cries. They finally sold Joseph to the Ismaelites who, equipped with camels and prepared for such trading trips, took Joseph to Egypt" (Jacob 1974:255). The dramatic high point of this story is "not the deed itself, but the deed's consequences as they are felt by the one brother" (Westermann 1996:17).

This complicated scheme involves some remorse. Firstly, as a consequence of selling Joseph to Egypt, he would be lost to them. Secondly, how could they tell their father about this tragedy? By showing their father the robe dipped in blood, is this proof enough that a wild beast had devoured him? They caused agony for Jacob, their father, because the robe dipped in blood proved that the tragedy of Joseph's death was definitely true.

Reuben's dismay at finding the pit empty is great, because his plan to save Joseph was thwarted by his brothers. As the eldest son, Reuben feels that he is accountable to his father (v. 30). Even though the brothers have been divided, they are still concerned about protecting their legitimate

right, by keeping their deed a secret (Westermann 1996:13). Regardless of Reuben's attitude of mourning for Joseph, the act had already been committed. Reuben feels his responsibility as the eldest son strongly and never betrays his brothers as this had been a decision made by them all.

During this time, Jacob's role passes temporarily to the eldest brother. One can trace the understanding of the concept of responsibility back to this situation (Westermann 1996:14). "Responsibility was a very real and concrete thing, as when the group returned to their father's house, the eldest brother would have to respond, quite literally, to their father's questions concerning all that had happened during the time of separation" (Westermann 1996:14). In this section Reuben acts as spokesperson. He seems to be the one who is supposed to report all that has happened during their separation from their father. He is one who knows all the answers that he will have to provide his father with from beginning to end. "The authority that is bestowed on the eldest brother during these times is not his own – it is merely transferred authority, which he must return to his father as soon as the group returns, and he must then be accountable to his father" (Westermann 1996:14). Only Jacob has real and original authority. It is very important to realise that this significance lies in the issue of responsibility. In this context, the eldest son's responsibility is not based on a feeling of responsibility or even a sense of duty, but rather a simple realisation that it is he who must give account. It quickly "becomes clear that the Joseph story is very much concerned with and involves different roles" (Westermann 1996:14).

## **6 Summary**

This chapter focused on the complication of the plot, and revealed some important points. For Joseph, it can be said that the complication of this chapter starts with Joseph himself being sent by his father to his brothers. The first difficulty which occurs here starts with the way he is supposed to continue his travelling. Even the narrator does not find this so complicated, it can be understood that Joseph struggled to find his brothers. Another complication occurs with his time in the pit, something he never expected.

For his brothers, the complication starts when they decide to throw him in the cistern (pit) followed by the action of selling him to the Ishmaelite. To justify their guilty, the complication

continues with the killing of a goat and the dipping of Joseph's robe in the blood, then bringing the long robe dipped in blood to their father as proof of Joseph's death. However, they feel guilty because Joseph has been sold into Egypt.

For Jacob himself, his negligence has terrible consequences and affects his entire life: "I shall go to Sheol mourning for my son. Thus, Joseph's father wept for him" (Gn 37:35). All those elements which draw us to the complication, as previously mentioned, come from the initial situation. What is relevant in the initial situation is the hatred, the jealousy and the selling of Joseph and the way they lie about the death of Joseph, and this is obviously linked to the complication.

Nevertheless, these situations affect the family and lead to the complication. This section of the Joseph narrative is itself complicated, and creates misunderstanding in the family. However, it was Reuben's responsibility, as the spokesperson for his brothers, to tell his father the truth: the brothers are concerned with protecting their legitimate right, which is a leitmotiv in terms of the brothers' deed. The second act starts with the lie when the brothers bring the tunic dipped in blood to their father: The strategy they adopted was intended to make their father believe that Joseph was dead – their father could not ignore the proof. Here, the deed itself involves Jacob's responsibility to recognise the tunic dipped in blood and to believe that they were telling the truth. Therefore, the brothers succeeded in their plan by telling a pack of lies: "a wild beast has devoured him" (v.33c). However, this situation involved some deception by means of an intentionally false statement. Unfortunately, becoming wise after the event or only understanding and assessing something after its implications have become obvious, needs to be transformed into wisdom.

The complication situation brings one to the bridge between when Joseph is sold to Egypt and the transforming action, and will focus specifically on the Judah story, as it will be shown in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### A “BRIDGE” IN THE JOSEPH NARRATIVE

#### (Gn 38:1–30)

### 1 Introduction

At first glance the place of Genesis 38 is unclear. As Coats (1974:15) argues, this story stands outside the unity in the Joseph story as an independent element with an independent plot. The link between chapter 37 and 39 is cemented by 37:36, which must be seen as an anticipation of the introductory sentence in Genesis 39 (Coats 1974:16). This apparent interruption is really quite comprehensible if one remembers the context of the text as a whole. If one looks at the *toledoth* (Gn 37:2), there should be no doubt that this episode has its place, because it is the history of Jacob’s family and continues to relate the lives of his other sons.

In fact, the Joseph narrative has just begun, and captures one’s attention with the horrible treatment of the young hero. “The conclusion of chapter 37 leaves one in suspense” (Arnold 1998:150), when the reader is informed that Joseph has been purchased by a high-ranking official in Egypt. There will certainly be more to this story and the complication of the narrative. “The story of Tamar is a complete unit that discusses various ancient traditions in meticulous detail. Judah is presented in this story as an individual, but he is also the ancestor of David’s line” (Plaut 1981:249). Joseph does not appear in this story, nor is he mentioned. This chapter is certainly perplexing, as it is quite out of place in this context. Nevertheless, it perhaps makes a significant contribution to the Joseph story.

Indeed, Genesis 39 begins with a note that obviously links the events of chapter 37: “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt”. In other words, the author has intentionally included Genesis 38 as an interlude between chapters 37 and 39. Before returning to Egypt to see what will become of Joseph, the narrator first invites us to consider the actions of Judah. This episode serves as a bridge between chapter 37 and chapter 39. The section which is focused on in this chapter deals with Genesis 38:1–30, and will be divided into four sections. The initial situation (Gn 38:1–11), which is the aim of this chapter, will open Judah’s story and will set the scene for what is going to follow. Thereafter, the complication of the story will be discussed

(Gn 38:12–18) followed by the transforming action (Gn 38:19–23), then it will deal with the section focused on the denouement which will reveal some important elements in this story (Gn 38:24–26). The last section, that is, the final situation (Gn 38:2–30) will summarise the findings of this story. This chapter will end with a conclusion.

## 2. Pericope

<sup>1</sup> About that time Judah parted from his brothers, and heading south he pitched his tent in company with an Andullamite named Hirah. <sup>2</sup> There he saw Bathshua the daughter of a Canaanite and married her. He lay with her, <sup>3</sup> and she conceived and bore a son, whom she called Er. <sup>4</sup> She conceived again and bore a son, whom she called Onan. <sup>5</sup> Once more she conceived and bore a son whom she called Shelah, and she was at Kezib when she bore him. <sup>6</sup> Judah found a wife for his eldest son Er; her name was Tamar. <sup>7</sup> But Judah's eldest son Er was wicked in the Lord's sight, and the Lord took away his life. <sup>8</sup> Then Judah told Onan to sleep with his brother's wife, to do his duty as the husband's brother and rise up offspring for his brother. <sup>9</sup> But Onan knew that the offspring would not count as his; so whenever he lay with his brother's wife, he spilled his seed on the ground so as not to rise up offspring for his brother. <sup>10</sup> What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight, and the Lord took away his life also. <sup>11</sup> Judah said to his daughter in law Tamar, Remain as a widow in your father's house until my son Shelah grows up; for he was afraid that Shelah too might die like his brothers. So Tamar went and stayed in her father's house.

<sup>12</sup> Time passed, and Judah's wife Bathshua died. When he had finished mourning, he and his friend Hirah the Adullamite went up to Timnath at sheep-shearing. <sup>13</sup> When Tamar was told that her father-in-law was on his way to shear his sheep at Timnath, <sup>14</sup> She took off her widow's clothes, covered her face with a veil, and then sat where the road forks on the way to Timnath. She did this because she saw that although Shelah was now grown up she had not been given to him as a wife. <sup>15</sup> When Judah saw her he thought she was a prostitute, for she had veiled her face. <sup>16</sup> He turned to her where she sat by the roadside and said, 'Let me lie with you,' not realizing she was his daughter-in-law. She said, 'what will you give to lie with me?' <sup>17</sup> He answered, 'I shall send you a young goat from my flock.' She said, 'I agree if you will give a pledge until you sent it.' <sup>18</sup> He asked what pledge he should give her, and she replied, 'Your seal and its cord, and the staff which you are holding.' He handed them over to her and lay with her, and she became pregnant. <sup>19</sup> She then rose and went home, where she took off her veil and put on her widow's clothes again. <sup>20</sup> Judah sent the goat by his friend the Adullamite in order to recover the pledge from the woman, but he could not find her. <sup>21</sup> When he enquired of the people of that place, 'Where is that temple-prostitute, the one who was sitting where the road forks?' They answered, 'There has been no temple-prostitute here.' <sup>22</sup> So he went back to Judah and reported that he had failed to find her and that the men of the place had said there was no such prostitute there. <sup>23</sup> Judah said, 'Let her keep the pledge, or we shall be a laughing-stock. After all, I did send the kid, even though you could not find her.' <sup>24</sup> About three month later Judah was told that his daughter-in-law Tamar had played the prostitute and got herself pregnant. 'Bring her out,' ordered Judah, so that she may be burnt.' <sup>25</sup> But as she was being brought out, she sent word to her father-in-law. 'The father of my child



is the man to whom these things belong,' she said. 'See if you recognize whose they are, this seal, the pattern of the cord, and the staff.' <sup>26</sup> Judah identified them and said, 'She is more in the right than I am, because I did not give her to my son Shelah.' He did not have intercourse with her again.

<sup>27</sup> When her time was come, she was found to have twins in her womb, <sup>28</sup> and while her in labour one of them put out a hand. The midwife took of a scarlet thread and fastened it round the wrist, saying, this one appeared first.' <sup>29</sup> No sooner had he drawn back his hand, than his brother came out and the midwife said, what! You have broken out first! So he was named Perez. <sup>30</sup> Soon afterwards his brother was born with the scarlet thread on his wrist, and he was named Zerah.

### **3 The scenes**

#### **3.1 Macro scene**

As was previously discussed in other chapters, this section, the so-called "bridge" between chapter 37 and 39–50, comes to reveal a very important link with the Joseph narrative, even if it never refers to the Joseph narrative. This story deals with one of Jacob's sons, that is, Judah, but it is independently transmitted. It shows how the childless widow is guaranteed to have a child after the death of her husband. The main point is that the story itself will relate to Judah's family, that is, the descendants of Judah and Tamar, as related in the book of Ruth. This section takes into consideration the quinary scheme as was followed in the Joseph story.

#### **3.2 Micro scene**

In this chapter, the scene is presented in five sections which represent the quinary scheme of a narrative plot as follows:

Genesis 38:1 is an introduction.

Genesis 38:2–11 reveals the initial situation.

Genesis 38:12–19 discusses the complication of the story.

Genesis 38:20–23 describes the transforming action.

Genesis 38:24–26 reveals the new process of the denouement.

Genesis 38:27–30 shows the final situation, that is, the outcome of the story.

#### 4 The initial situation (Gn 38:1–11)

In contrast to Joseph, who was separated by force from his brothers, Judah was voluntarily separated from his brothers. The expression “about that time Judah left his brothers” (Gn 38:1) presented as a redactional bridge, seems to indicate a problem between Judah and his brothers, maybe as a consequence of the sale of Joseph, when the brothers suddenly began to appreciate the depth of their father’s grief. Plaut (1981:254) argues that they blamed Judah by saying: you are the one who “suggested that we sell Joseph and we followed you”. If “you suggested to us to set Joseph free we would have followed you also”. This is perhaps the reason why “Judah left his brothers”. These questions will be explored through the character and acts of Judah.

The first section speaks of Judah establishing a family. The Hebrew expression *wayehi bahath hahi’h wayered Yehoudah* (Gn 38:1) fixes the time when Judah tried to descend from the heights of the family home in Hebron to the Canaanite city. The word, *wayered*, reminds one of the story of Samson, who descended to Timna. The verb *yarad*, which means “went down”, “turned aside to”, or “departed from”, can be translated as “fall down”. If one refers to Samson’s story, the route he was taking was very risky. In fact, going down suggests the same thing as “falling down”. In French, the verb is deeply significant and likewise denotes a negative event such as to fall down or die. *Yarad*, which literally means “went down” is the opposite of *alah*, which means “went up”, “to take up”, “to raise up”, “to go ahead”, and has a different meaning to *nafal*. Judah’s departure from his brothers was in order to meet Adullamite, a man from Adullam, which “was a town about 15 miles (24 km) north-west of Hebron” (Ryrie 1995:65). The situation appears to be similar in the Judah–Tamar narrative and in the Joseph narrative. Judah finds himself living in another country, far away from his family, similar to Joseph being far from Canaan and finding himself alone in Egypt, where he is left to grow up on his own.

In fact, the word “Canaanite” (v.2) is translated as “trafficker” or “merchant”. Going to a Canaanite locality was not the will of God, since this migration resulted in friendly contact, even intermarriage. In the view of this study, the verb *yarad* is used correctly, because Judah left his brothers and went down to the Canaanites, who lived almost on the plains. “He was also the first of his brothers to lower himself by seeking intercourse with Canaanites” (Jacob

1974:257). Judah, during this time, married a Canaanite, Shua's daughter, who conceived and bore him three sons (Er, Onan and Shela). In this text, "Judah is not mentioned either for praise or blame" (Skinner 1994:450) of his action.

This episode describes the character of Judah in different ways. In the Joseph narrative, Judah is presented as the one who realised that "murdering Joseph was senseless (pointless) when they could gain a profit by selling him" (Gn 37:26–27). A part of Judah's character is unfortunately a consequence of his descending from Hebron, which was in the mountains.

In any event, the initial situation affected some characters and acts as well in this section. Verses 6–11 reveal the major characters in this story: It is Judah's responsibility as a father when his sons grow up to choose a wife for them. He gave him a wife named Tamar. Er, the firstborn action, seems to be very complicated, occurs: "Judah's eldest son Er was wicked in the Lord's sight, and the Lord took away his life" (Gn 38:7). This kind of action is always dealt with in terms of the consequence of death. It comes as God's punishment. However, in Genesis 38:7, the text seems to be quiet about what Er has done. It simply mentions that Er's offence displeased God, and that his firstborn child was wicked in the Lord's sight (v.7). Er did not want to beget children, so as to not mar the beauty of his wife by pregnancy (Jacob 1974:258).

Tamar is left as a young, childless widow. As local custom requires, Judah is responsible for seeing that the family of the departed is continued (Westermann 1987:269). Therefore, Judah is also responsible for carrying out the levirate obligation (Skinner 1994:451). He is supposed to advise his son, Onan, to take care of his brother's deceased wife and perform the levirate, as it is referred to in later law. The word "levirate" which refers to *yubim* (the levirate marriage) comes from the Latin word for "brother-in-law" (Jacob 1974:258). The levirate "requires a surviving brother to beget a child (or children) with his sister-in-law; such a child is considered a child of the departed" (Westermann 1987:269; Ryrie 1995:66). This custom demanded that if a man died without male descendants or offspring, his brother should marry his widow and a son born of this union was considered to be the son of the dead man (Dt 25:5–10 cp Ruth 3–4). This was intended to carry on the deceased brother's name and to build a family for him. Some scholars further argue that Judah was the founder of the levirate institution (Jacob 1974:258).

Furthermore, Judah told Onan to sleep with his brother's wife, to do his duty as the husband's brother and bring up offspring for his brother (Gn 38:8). In fact, it does not mean that Tamar should "become Onan's wife, her sole concern throughout the story is to get a son" (Westermann 1987:269). Onan obeys his father, but his only offence was his selfish disregard for his deceased brother's interests (Skinner 1994:452; Jacob 1974:258) in terms of the custom of the levirate. However, his refusal to perform this duty stems from his desire to have the inheritance of the first-born child for himself. Therefore, "He spilled his seed on the ground" (v.9) literally means "emitted" or "wasted his seed" or "let the semen spill". He thus evades his levirate duty.

Normally, the inheritance would have gone to Tamar's child, even if that child was fathered by Onan (Ryrie 1995:65–67; Jacob 1974:258). The result is that God causes Onan to die (Gn 38:9–10), which also indicates that Judah's request had pleased God. Something extremely important occurs in this situation, and this is that "the name of his first son (Er) was given by his father (Jacob) who expected him to continue his family name, Judah" (Jacob 1974:257). Judah's sons, as well as all his brothers with the exception of Joseph, were born in Canaan (Jacob 1974:257).

Judah's situation becomes more and more difficult. He does not know what to do with his daughter-in-law. Shelah, his last born, is so young. According to the principle, the duty would revert to Shelah. In order to protect his daughter-in-law, it would be uncharitable of Judah to still recognise her as such, but rather to see her as betrothed to Shelah. Nevertheless, he sends her to her father's house. He tells her to wait for Shelah, but keeps his true motive to himself (Jacob 1974:258). In the same way that the brothers deceived Jacob about Joseph's death (Gn 37:32–35), Judah continues true to form by withholding Shelah from Tamar while giving her the impression that it was only a matter of time (Gn 38:11).

Therefore, the initial situation involves Judah living separated from his family and his action in marrying a Canaanite and giving birth to three sons with all the consequences as mentioned above. It is not easy for Judah to make Tamar wait for Shelah but Judah think that if Tamar were removed from the house, Shelah's duty to marry her might become less pressing as time

passed. He was possibly influenced by the belief that one should not tempt fate three times. This is because a woman whose loses two husbands was considered to be a poor candidate for a third marriage, and should therefore not marry again. This situation will be dealt with in the complication that follows.

## **5 The complication (Gn 38:12–19)**

The complication action draws from the initial situation. This started when Judah did not finish his mourning: “Time passed, and Judah’s wife Bathshua died” (Gn 38:12) and involved all the mourning including the death of his two sons (Er and Onan). However, “when he had finished mourning”, meaning literally that when he had been comforted and the mourning period was over, he returned to the joy of living. He went up “to Timnah at sheep-shearing” (Gn 38:12), which were the festivities that were held on such occasions. Timnah was located in the hill country south of Jerusalem (cp. Josh 15:10). This was not the Timnah near the coast that is mentioned in Samson’s story.

Therefore, there are very important elements which make this story so complicated. After the death of Judah’s wife, and when he had finished mourning, Judah went from his friend’s place down to Timnah. This action is related to the first when he left his brothers and went down to his friend. As was previously mentioned, this action “to go down” has connotations of evil as is clearly shown in this section. “Tamar, who is living as a widow in her father’s house, realises that she is being deprived of her rights. She undertakes to obtain her due on her own initiative by contriving a daring but risky plan” (Westermann 1987:269). The death of Judah’s wife seems to give her a chance to call on his duty which was complicated by his action: “she took off her widow’s clothes, covered her face with a veil, and then sat where the road forks on the way to Timnah” (v.14). She disguises herself as a harlot and sits down by the side of the road he must travel. This explains not only Judah’s failure to recognise her, but also his mistaking her for a harlot (Skinner 1994:453). “Prostitutes customarily stationed themselves on the open road” (Ryrie 1995:66). It seems that “Tamar is determined to obtain her rights without any moral judgement” (Westermann 1987:269). Judah approaches her by making a promise “I shall send you a young goat” (v.17). The goat was sacred to the goddess of love in the classical antiquity (Skinner 1994:453). Therefore, she will succeed in her action as “she conceives a

child with Judah and takes a pledge that enables her to prove that he is the father” (Westermann 1987:269). As Skinner argues (1994:453), “the master-stroke of Tamar’s plot is the securing of a pledge which rendered the identification of the owner absolutely certain”. The pledge consists of an aristocrat’s insignia, attested in both Babylonia and Canaan: a signet ring with a cord used to sign contracts and a staff carved with his own mark (Westermann 1987:269). Therefore, the death of Judah’s wife came like a palliation of his subsequent behaviour; even in early times it was considered not quite right for a married man to have intercourse with a harlot (Skinner 1994:453). This situation is complicated in the fact that Judah and Tamar, without knowing their relationship, failed in their duty to one another. Wilson (2004:80) identifies an important symbol in this text, and notes that

.... a trebling motif appears quite often in this chapter which joins the various sections together: Judah has *three* sons; *three* times Tamar is paired with a sexual partner (Er, Onan and Judah); there are *three* items given in pledge (seal, cord, staff in his hand); there are *three* references to Judah withholding Shelah (Gn 38:11, 14, 26).

When Tamar hears of Judah’s trip, she cleverly tricks him, gaining the evidence she needs to implicate Judah, and succeeds in falling pregnant, expecting that justice will be done (Wilson 2004:89). This action teaches the value of resourcefulness, and how even seemingly impossible situations can be redeemed and reversed.

The word *Enaim* in verse 14 literally meaning “opening of eyes” and is the place where Sarah was vindicated from hidden harlotry. It also refers to Tamar’s vindication, and follows an act openly performed. Tamar sits down at the entrance of Enaim. This expression leads one to reflect that while Tamar is motivated by duty, Judah is driven by his desires. Therefore, Judah appears to be indecisive and lustful because he does not know that this woman is his daughter-in-law, whereas Tamar appears to be skilful and prudent by insisting on Judah’s pledges, that is, the mark she will need as proof of his identity. Judah has definitely been duped when he sends his friend Hirah to meet a *qedeshah*, literally a prostitute or harlot, to redeem the pledges, namely *hotam* (seal), *peh’k* (cord) and *matseh* (staff). These items convey important meanings. The seal was a cylindrical shape, mounted on a pin and suspended by a cord, and worn by the

owner as part of his public attire. Imprints of the seal were used as signatures in order to represent the owner.

Tamar's irresponsibility lies in causing a scandal for her father-in-law by duping him, which is prohibited. However, her behaviour and prudence show her wisdom when she says that whoever wants to lie with her leaves her a signet. Her attitude is found in Babylonian women—when someone wants to lie with them, that person is supposed to leave a signet or some money before he can do so. This immorality is regarded in Canaanite culture as a “holy function” (Ryrie 1995:66). “Women who prostituted themselves in the service of a religious cult were frequently found in antiquity” (Jacob 1974:260). Was it realistic for Tamar to behave like this towards her father-in-law? Tamar asked for and received, as a pledge of later payment for her services, Judah's seal, worn on a cord around his neck, and his staff (Gn 38:18). These pledges had their meanings. A cord may have been carried as a mark of a man's dignity – the signet was usually tied to it. Staffs with insignia on them were also worn. All these were objects belonging to an individual by which the owner could be recognised beyond any doubt (Jacob 1974:259).

Judah's act may be summarised in two points: firstly, he left his brothers and went down to Timnah. Jewish people were not permitted to dwell in the land of the Canaanites. Hence, this action was risky. Judah is also irresponsible in that, during his mourning, he sought out a harlot. This action contrasts with that of Joseph when he was tempted by his master Potiphar's wife. This deception is made apparent in the passing of the years (Gn 38:14) that lead Tamar to dress up as a prostitute and so “deceive the deceiver” (Lockwood 1992:36; Wilson 2004:91). The goat is also used in relation to each story the blood of goat (Gn 37:31) and the goat is offered as a pledge (Gn 38:17). Alter (1981:11) suggests that while the reader may make this connection, there is no evidence that Judah himself was not conscious of it. He concludes that “Judah with Tamar after Judah with his brothers is an exemplary narrative instance of the deceiver deceived” (Alter 1981:10). Furthermore, “all these parallels appear to indicate that many of the themes in the larger Joseph story are subtly anticipated in Genesis 38” (Wilson 2004:91). Therefore, Wilson (2004:9) by referring to Wildavsky (1993:58) argues that Judah's sexual gratification (Gn 38:12–19) in contrast with Joseph's refusal of the offer by Potiphar's wife (Gn

39:7–12) reflects the same root “to go down”, but “in each case a garment is involved (38:14, 19 with 39:12, 13, 15, 18) and used by a woman to deceive a male”. “Both of the women involved are apparently foreigners, not Israelites”.

## **6 Transforming action (Gn 38:20–23)**

This section so-called transforming action of the plot reveals an important point which is the centre of this chapter. It links the initial situation to the complication, then deals with the denouement in the final situation. It seems to me a bridge in the story. The phrase, “Where is that temple-prostitute” referred to the Hebrew word *kedeshah* (v.21) which is used by Judah to mean “harlot”. It referred to a cult prostitute, which gave the relationship a somewhat more acceptable status. The word *kedeshah* in fact strictly means “sacred prostitute” (Skinner 1994:454). Tamar is separating herself for private prostitution; and it is possible that this custom was familiar to the Canaanites, though not in Israel (Skinner 1994:454). Ritual prostitutes participated in fertility cults in many ancient cultures. It can be said that “Tamar has prudently seen to this. In addition, the scene is meant to depict Judah as a man of honour, he does all he can to discharge his debt” (Westermann 1987:269). The expression “a laughing stock” suggests that Judah became a subject of public discussion and was at the receiving end of mocking remarks, owing to his relationship with the prostitute.

## **7 The denouement (Gn 38:24–26)**

The denouement which is developed in this section reminds us of the death of Judah’s wife and the complication of his life, having lain with his daughter-in-law who he considered a prostitute. The final action of this complication is the pledge: Tamar asks him firstly to promise to bring her a goat next time. The denouement confirms the fact of their relationship in terms of intercourse. The effect of Judah being exposed in Genesis 38 is that the righteousness of Tamar is revealed to all (Humphreys 1988:37–38). It may also show “that right will triumph over the wrongs of chapter 37, which may entail the restoration of Joseph” (Wilson 2004:89). Three months later, Judah is told: “Tamar your daughter-in-law has played the harlot; and moreover she is with child by harlotry” (Gn 38:24). This verse serves to denounce Tamar’s harlotry. From then on, her responsibility is known. According to the Law of Moses, this kind of person is supposed to be burned, because it is a disgrace in the presence of God. It is inadmissible to



allow such a person to live. In this case, Tamar is supposed to be burned as a consequence of her sin. Scholars present Judah as “a ruler and judge on his own authority” (Jacob 1974:260). “He applies the severest punishment, because the sons of Jacob were especially strict regarding their family’s honour” (Jacob 1974:260). Tamar was supposed to be burned (Gn 38:24) because the laws of adultery included those who were betrothed and Tamar was considered as being betrothed to Shelah. Judah, as the head of the family, possessed judicial powers. However, Deut 22:23–24 mentions stoning, not burning. In term of character and act, Judah was wrong on two counts: refusing to give Tamar his son to be her husband, and committing adultery with her (Gn 38:26).

Tamar’s trial is clearer. She never reacts to her father-in-law during the trial, but she tries to show in another way who is responsible for sending her to her father-in-law, and lets them know about the pledge she had received (Gn 38:25). She does not say anything – it is only the “interpretation of the intent of her message” (Jacob 1974:260).

In this episode, Judah is presented as the one who failed to express any grief or show remorse for the loss of his two sons, and succinctly gives the order to have Tamar burned for her crime. The death penalty is to be carried out in front of the gate outside the town so all the citizens will be involved in the execution (Dt 22:21–24). In fact, the burning is the punishment imposed in Hammurabi for incest with a mother, and was doubtless the common punishment for adultery on the part of a woman in ancient Israel (Skinner 1994:455). Tamar was expecting this in that she did not say anything in her own defence and did not ask for mercy. At the very last moment, condemned to be burnt to death and about to be led out of the city to be executed, “she makes her justification as public and dramatically complete as possible” (Skinner 1994:455) by sending “Judah the insignia that proved he was the father of the child” (Westermann 1987:270). Therefore, “Tamar shows her fortitude by her disregard of conventional prejudice and her determination by any means in her power to secure her wifely rights within her husband’s family” (Skinner 1994:455). Now, he can bear witness to her innocence by this proof. But Tamar’s strategy shuts the mouth of her father-in-law. However, after it becomes known that he is guilty in the situation he declares: “She is more in the right than me” (Gn 38:26). This public declaration demonstrates that Judah is a man of honour. Therefore, Tamar’s “conduct is

justified by his own injustice” (Westermann 1987:270).

The most important point here is the courage of women like Tamar who venture everything to fight for their rights (Gn 38:25). Like a true mother in Judah, she manages her part so cleverly that the dangerous path conducts her to a happy goal (Skinner 1994:455). The important thing to be mentioned here is that once he knew that he was guilty, he did not go to her until she gave birth. It follows that the episode is not meant to reflect discredit on the tribe of Judah. It presents Judah’s behaviour in as favourable a light as possible, suggesting extenuating circumstances for what could not be altogether excused; and regards that of Tamar as a glory to the tribe (Skinner 1994:455)

### **8 The final situation (Gn 38:27–30)**

In fact, the final situation is linked with the initial situation in term of relationship with Judah’s family. An important point is that in this digression the son who will be born from Tamar will be the ancestor of David. The question is: why is the Judah-Tamar narrative included in the Jacob-Joseph story? Judah seems to be the ultimate preserver of the house of Israel, since, from the union of this tribal progenitor and his daughter-in-law, Perez is born, and from him will descend the person and the house of David through Boaz and Ruth (Rt 4:12–22). A similar issue in this story is that Tamar and Ruth were both widows and not Israelites, but both claimed a son in terms of the levirate tradition.

Plaut (1981:253) argues that “the Judah-Tamar interlude is, therefore, not merely an old tribal tale but an important link in the main theme: to show the steady, though not always readily visible, guiding hand of God who never forgets his people and their destiny”. In fact, Tamar was a Canaanite (person who was opposed to Abraham). Tamar’s action bring new lives into being (Gn 38:27–30), while Joseph also tells his brothers that God sent him ahead to preserve life (Gn 45:5, 7). “In addition both stories end with a list of descendants as a symbol of continuing life” (Wilson 2004:89). The line of Judah continues (38:27–30), while in the wider story, chapters 48–49 outline the future of Jacob’s descendants. In each case life is preserved and promoted despite the real possibility of death. “A beneficial outcome is implied in both accounts, injecting a note of optimism and possibility” (Wilson 2004:89). However, Tamar was

treated with respect, and her desperate deed draws no condemnation from the Torah. What she did fulfilled the requirements of Hebrew law and, in addition, appeared to serve the higher purposes of God.

Tamar has been described as a woman who wants a child at any price, disregards customs and laws, commits incest, and risks her life and honour in order to fulfil her purpose (Jacob 1974:261). This story is actually often regarded as objectionable, as it is the crown of the book of Genesis, and Tamar is regarded as one of the most admirable women. Therefore, the situation of Judah-Tamar is not a big issue. It can never be a special story coming out of Joseph's narrative. If the narrator finds it better to include it in Joseph's narrative, one should consider that. Two important points need to be appreciated: Judah, as a son of Jacob, living far away from his brothers, denotes his character and refers to the generation of Jacob. Joseph, as a son of Jacob, lives far away from his family, and grows up alone in a foreign country – Egypt.

The purpose of this chapter is suggested by its conclusion. It results in Perez, the ancestor of David, and the Judean royal dynasty. If the levirate institution introduced by Judah is one point which seems to be overlooked, this study views it as a sign of responsibility in the family. Without doubt, Judah informed Tamar, as a stranger, about his family and their exalted mission, even their divine promise, which became hers by marrying his first son, Er. In this regard, this study suggests that Tamar's purpose was to bear a child from this family by any means. The important thing to note here is that this prohibited relationship produced the descendant of David. However, the honour of incest is not the cause, but the effect, of this prohibition. Tamar is the worthy successor of the wives of the patriarchs. According to Jacob (1974:262), "nobility of mind is more than nobility of family". "Tamar represents the triumph of the spirit over blood, and the attraction of national-religious ideas and faith" (Jacob 1974:262-263). However, according to some scholars, "Joseph's coming to Egypt begins Israel's bondage. On the other hand, Perez is the ancestor of the Messianic king. The hero of the following story is Joseph, but the salvation will come from Judah" (Jacob 1974:263; Ryrie 1995:65-67). This story definitely has more immediate significance in terms of chapter 39.

## 9 Summary

At first sight, the place of Genesis 38 appears to be unclear but reasonable, according to the context of the narration. This apparent interruption is really quite comprehensible if one remembers the context of the whole. If one looks at the *toledoth* (Gn 37:2), there should be no doubt that this episode has its place, because it is the history of Jacob's family and continues to relate the lives of his other sons. Therefore, Joseph's narrative has just begun, and captures one's attention with the horrible treatment of the young hero. The conclusion of chapter 37 leaves one in suspense when the reader is informed that Joseph has been purchased by a high-ranking official in Egypt. There will certainly be more to this story. As a bridge, it is also an interlude between chapters 37 and 39. The narrator tries to reveal the reason why this story appears in this section. No reason for Judah living with his brothers is provided.

However, the structure of Genesis 38 appears to mirror that of the whole Joseph story. Both (the Joseph story and Judah's story) begin by describing the wider family, and the tensions within it. One very important point is that, finally, it leads to the continuation of the family line, with a focus on the descendants as suggested by Wilson (2004:88) in the following scheme.

The Joseph story	Judah–Tamar	Description
Genesis 37	Genesis 38:1–11	The wider family picture
Genesis 39–47	Gen 38:12–16	The human initiatives of a main character (God behind the scenes) to right a wrong through the use of a shrewd plan
Gen 46:8–27 and Genesis 48–50	Gen 38:27–30	A genealogical summary of subsequent descendants (amplified in Joseph's case to include the future destiny of his brothers).

“A fruitful contrast between Tamar and Potiphar's wife emerges when the two texts are placed side by side. Tamar's sexual act was prompted by her desire to fulfil her responsibility to her deceased husband; Potiphar's wife sought to breach her responsibility to her alive husband” (West 1984:250; Wilson 2004:92). The double comparison (Judah and Joseph; Tamar and Potiphar's wife) serves to highlight the contrasting responses to sexual invitation, a key theme

in Proverbs 5–7 (Wilson 2004:92). In the broader narrative, there is death (37:32–35), and the prospect of starving to death (42:2). In chapter 38, there is the death of Judah’s wife and first two sons (38:7, 10, 12), as well as Judah’s decision to keep Shelah and Tamar separated (Wilson 2004:88–89).

Indeed, Genesis 39 begins with a note that obviously links the events of chapter 37: “Now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt.” In other words, the author has intentionally included Genesis 38 as an interlude and it serves as bridge between chapters 37 and 39. Before returning to Egypt to see what will become of Joseph, the narrator first invites us to consider the actions of Judah. Joseph and Judah receive pride of place in these blessings. This also reflects their important roles in the future of Israel. The nation will be largely comprised of Judah in the south, and the tribes of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh in the north. What can one learn from this story of Tamar and Judah? It is evident that some irresponsibility was present.

As it previously mentioned, Judah’s act may be summarised in two points: firstly, he left his brothers and went down to Timnah; an action not authorised as Jewish people were not allowed to dwell with the Canaanites. The second action is the consequence of his risky action when, on the way to Timnah, he sought out a harlot. Therefore, this action is a contrast with Joseph who was also tempted by Potiphar’s wife. This section takes into consideration the fact that Judah left his brothers and went to Canaan, and then to Timnah where he lay with his daughter-in-law. The complication of this act deals with Tamar’s strategy which is shown as a transformative action. From Tamar’s righteousness it leads to the denouement and ends with the final situation which involves Judah’s tribe. Judah’s story is linked with the Joseph narrative. This section is the centre of whole the story which will be followed in the Joseph narrative. Therefore, reading Genesis 38 as a part of the Joseph narrative, it is “pregnant with meaning” (Wilson 2004:93). It not only sheds “light on the tale of Judah and Tamar, but also illuminates the Joseph narrative” (Wilson 2004:94), as will be shown in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **TRANSFORMING ACTION (Gn 39:1–41:57)**

#### **1 Introduction**

Why is this section of the plot is called the “transforming action”? What events happened that transformed Joseph? These two important questions will draw us to think about this transforming action. Firstly, this section of the Joseph story (Gn 39:1–41:57) begins with a statement that clearly links the events of chapter 37: Now “Joseph was taken down to Egypt”. It urges us to reflect on what Joseph’s brothers have done. The Joseph story appears as if it is something new.

Judging by the pace of camels, their journey must have taken some weeks. Joseph was supposed to be tied up at the slave market, where Ishmaelite masters conducted sales by means of an auction. In this situation, Joseph must have really been daunted, revolted and in despair. However, the furnace of sorrow became for him the melting-pot in which his character was forged. Far away from his family, Joseph’s life would be moulded according to the context in which he was, and therefore under God’s control.

This section, the so called “transforming action”, ushers in Joseph’s new life; he who was previously described as tale-bearer and as being arrogant. Some experiences in Egypt had a great effect on or impact in his life: the first was in Potiphar’s house, where for thirteen years Joseph served his master after he had suffered injustices and ended up in prison because of his master’s wife. After this affliction, and because of his integrity, he discovered the hand of God which guided and moulded his life towards an important purpose. The second experience was his life in prison and the trust placed in him by the guardhouse, as well as the ability that he had to interpret the dreams of officials at the prison. Even he was not able to explain his own dreams when he was with his family. The last experience was after prison, when he went to the Pharaoh’s court as an interpreter of dreams, and was then elevated to the position of vizier of Egypt. This section focuses on the characters and acts revealed in this narrative.

## 2 Pericope

**39** <sup>1</sup>When Joseph was taken down to Egypt by the Ishmaelites, he was bought from them by an Egyptian, Potiphar, one of Pharaoh's court officials, the captain of the guard. <sup>2</sup> Joseph prospered, for the LORD was with him. He lived in the house of his Egyptian master, <sup>3</sup> who saw that the LORD was with him and was giving him success in all that he undertook. <sup>4</sup> Thus Joseph won his master's favour, and became his attendant. Indeed, his master put him in charge of his household, and entrusted him with everything he had. <sup>5</sup> From the time that he put Joseph in charge of his household and all his property, the LORD blessed the household through Joseph; the LORD'S blessing was on all that was his in house and field. <sup>6</sup> Potiphar left it all in Joseph's care, and concerned himself with nothing but the food he ate.

Now Joseph was handsome in both face and figure, <sup>7</sup> and after a time his master's wife became infatuated with him. 'Come make love to me,' she said. <sup>8</sup> But Joseph refused. 'Think of my master,' he said; 'he leaves the management of his whole house to me; he has trusted me with all he has. <sup>9</sup> I am as important in this house as he is, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How can I do such a wicked thing? It is sin against God.' <sup>10</sup> Though she kept on at Joseph day after day, he refused to lie with her or to be in her company.

<sup>11</sup> One day when he came into the house to see to his duties, and none of the household servants was there indoors, <sup>12</sup> she caught him by his loincloth, saying, 'Come, make love to me,' but he left the loincloth in her hand and ran from the house. <sup>13</sup> When she saw he had left his loincloth and run out of the house, <sup>14</sup> she called to her servants, 'Look at this! My husband has brought in a Hebrew to bring insult on us. He came in here to rape me, but I gave a loud scream. <sup>15</sup> When he heard me scream and call for help, he ran out, leaving his loincloth behind.' <sup>16</sup> She kept it by her until his master came home, <sup>17</sup> and then she repeated her tale: 'That Hebrew slave you brought in came to my room to make an object of insult. <sup>18</sup> But when I screamed for help, he ran out of the house, leaving his loincloth behind.' <sup>19</sup> Joseph's master was furious when he heard his wife's account of what his slave had done to her. <sup>20</sup> He had Joseph seized and thrown into the guardhouse, where the king's prisoners were kept; and there he was confined. <sup>21</sup> But the LORD was with Joseph and kept faith with him, so that he won the favour of the governor of the guardhouse. <sup>22</sup> Joseph was put in charge of the prisoners, and he directed all their work. <sup>23</sup> The governor ceased to concern himself with anything entrusted to Joseph, because the LORD was with him and gave him success in all that he did.

**40** Sometime after these events it happened that the king's cupbearer and the all royal baker gave offence to their lord, the king of Egypt. <sup>2</sup> Pharaoh was displeased with his two officials, his chief cupbearer and chief baker, <sup>3</sup> and put them in custody in the house of the captain of the guard, in the guardhouse where Joseph was imprisoned. <sup>4</sup> The captain appointed Joseph as their attendant, and he waited on them.

They had been in prison in the guardhouse for some time, <sup>5</sup> when one night the king's cupbearer and his baker both had dreams, each with a meaning of its own. <sup>6</sup> Coming to them in the morning, Joseph saw that they looked

dispirited, <sup>7</sup> and asked these officials in custody with him in his master's house, why they were so downcast that day. <sup>8</sup> They replied, 'We have each had a dream, but there is no one to interpret them.' Joseph said to them, 'All interpretation belongs to God. Why not tell me your dream?' <sup>9</sup> So the chief cupbearer told Joseph his dream: 'In my dream', he said, 'there was a wine in front of me. <sup>10</sup> On the wine there were three branches, and as soon as it budded, it blossomed and its clusters ripened into grapes. <sup>11</sup> I plucked the grapes and pressed them into Pharaoh's cup which I was holding, and then put the cup into Pharaoh's hand.' <sup>12</sup> Joseph said to him, 'This is the interpretation. The three branches are three days: <sup>13</sup> within three days Pharaoh will raise your head and restore you to your post; then you will put the cup into Pharaoh's hand as you used to do when you were his cupbearer. <sup>14</sup> When things go well with you, remember me and do me the kindness of bringing my case to Pharaoh's notice; help me to get out of this prison. <sup>15</sup> I was carried off by force from the land of the Hebrews, and here I have done nothing to deserve being put into this dungeon.'

<sup>16</sup> When the chief baker saw that the interpretation given by Joseph had been favourable, he said to him, 'I too had a dream, and in my dream there were three baskets of white bread on my head. <sup>17</sup> In the top basket there was every kind of food such as a baker might prepare for Pharaoh, but the birds were eating out of the top basket of my head.' <sup>18</sup> Joseph answered, 'This is the interpretation. The three baskets are three days: <sup>19</sup> within three days Pharaoh will raise your head off your shoulders and hang you on a tree, and the birds of the air will devour the flesh off your bones.' <sup>20</sup> The third day was Pharaoh's birthday and he gave a banquet for all his officials. He had the chief cupbearer and the chief baker brought up where they were all assembled. <sup>21</sup> The cupbearer was restored to his position, and he put the cup into Pharaoh's hand; <sup>22</sup> but the baker was hanged. All went as Joseph had said in interpreting the dreams for them. <sup>23</sup> The cupbearer, however, did not bear Joseph in mind; he forgot him.

**41** Two years later Pharaoh had a dream: he was standing by the Nile, <sup>2</sup> when they came up from the river seven cows, sleek and fat, and they grazed among the reeds. <sup>3</sup> Presently seven other cows, gaunt and lean, came up from the river, and stood beside the cows on the river bank. <sup>4</sup> The cows that were gaunt and lean devoured the seven cows that were sleek and fat. Then Pharaoh woke up.

<sup>5</sup> He fell asleep again and had second dream: he saw seven ears of grain, full and ripe, growing on a single stalk. <sup>6</sup> Springing up after them were seven other ears, thin and shrivelled by the east wind. <sup>7</sup> The thin ears swallowed up the seven ears that were full and plump. Then Pharaoh woke up and found it was a dream. <sup>8</sup> In the morning Pharaoh's mind was so troubled that he summoned all the dream- interpreters and wise men of Egypt, and told them his dreams; but there was no one who could interpret them for him. <sup>9</sup> Then Pharaoh's chief cupbearer spoke up. 'Now I must mention my offences,' he said: <sup>10</sup> 'Pharaoh was angry with his servants, and imprisoned me and the chief baker in the house of the captain of the guard. <sup>11</sup> One night we both had dreams, each requiring its own interpretation. <sup>12</sup> We had with us there a young Hebrew, a slave of the captain of the guard, and when we told him our dreams he interpreted them for us, giving each dream its own interpretation. <sup>13</sup> Things turned out exactly as the dreams had been interpreted to us: I was restored to my post, the other was hanged.



<sup>14</sup>Pharaoh thereupon sent for Joseph, and they hurriedly brought him out of the dungeon. After he had shaved and changed his clothes, he came in before Pharaoh, <sup>15</sup>who said to him, 'I have had a dream which no one can interpret. I have heard that you can interpret any dream you hear.' <sup>16</sup>Joseph answered, 'Not I, but God, can give answered which will reassure Pharaoh.' <sup>17</sup>Then Pharaoh said to him: 'In my dream I was standing on the bank of the Nile, <sup>18</sup>when there came up from the river seven cows, fat and sleek, and they grazed among the reeds. <sup>19</sup>After them seven other cows came up that were in poor condition, very gaunt and lean; in all Egypt I have never seen such gaunt creatures. <sup>20</sup>These lean, gaunt cows devoured the first cows, the seven fat ones. <sup>21</sup>They were swallowed up, but no one could have told they were in the bellies of the others, which looked just as gaunt as before. Then I woke up. <sup>22</sup>In another dream I saw seven ears of grain, full and ripe, growing on a single stalk. <sup>23</sup>Springing up after them were seven other ears, blighted, thin, and shrivelled by the east wind. <sup>24</sup>The thin ears swallowed up the seven ripe ears. When I spoke to the dram-interpreters, no one could tell me the meaning.'

<sup>25</sup>Joseph said to Pharaoh, 'Pharaoh's dreams are both the same; God has told Pharaoh what he is about to do. <sup>26</sup>The seven good cows are seven years, and the seven good ears of grain are seven years – it is all one dream. <sup>27</sup>The seven lean and gaunt cows that came up after them are seven years, and so also are the seven empty ears of grain blighted by the east wind; there are going to be seven years of famine. <sup>28</sup>It is as I have told Pharaoh: God has let Pharaoh see what he is about to do. <sup>29</sup>There are to be seven years of bumper harvests throughout Egypt. <sup>30</sup>After them will come seven years of famine; so that the great harvests in Egypt will all be forgotten, and famine will ruin the country. <sup>31</sup>The good years will leave no trace in the land because of the famine that follows, for it will be very severe. <sup>32</sup>That Pharaoh has dreamed this twice means God is firmly resolved on this plan, and very soon he will put it into effect.

<sup>33</sup>'Let Pharaoh now look for a man of vision and wisdom and put him in charge of the country. <sup>34</sup>Pharaoh should take steps to appoint commissioners over the land to take one fifth of the produce of Egypt during the seven years of plenty. <sup>35</sup>They should collect all food produced in the good years are coming and put the grain under Pharaoh's control as a store of food to be kept in the towns. <sup>36</sup>This food will be a reserve for the country against the seven years of famine which will come on Egypt, and so the country will not be devastated by the famine.'

<sup>37</sup>The plan commended itself both to Pharaoh and to all his officials, <sup>38</sup>and Pharaoh asked them, 'could we find another like this, one so endowed with the spirit of God?' <sup>39</sup>To Joseph he said, 'Since God has made all this known to you, no one has your vision and wisdom. <sup>40</sup>You shall be in charge of my household, and all my people will respect your every word. Only in regard to the throne shall I rank higher than you.' <sup>41</sup>Pharaoh went on, 'I hereby give you authority over the whole land of Egypt.' <sup>42</sup>He took off his signet ring and put it on Joseph's finger; he had him dressed in robe of fine linen, and hung a gold chain round his neck. <sup>43</sup>He mounted him in his viceroy's chariot and men cried 'Make way!' before him. Thus Pharaoh made him ruler over all Egypt <sup>44</sup>and said to him, 'I am the Pharaoh, yet without your consent no one will lift hand or foot throughout Egypt.' <sup>45</sup>Pharaoh named him Zaphenath-paneah, and he gave him as his wife Asenath daughter of Potiphera priest of On. Joseph's authority extended over the whole Egypt.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph was thirty years old at the time he entered the service of Pharaoh King of Egypt. When he left the royal presence, he made a tour of inspection through the land. <sup>47</sup> During the seven years of plenty when they were abundant harvests, <sup>48</sup> Joseph gathered all the food produced in Egypt then and stored it in the towns, putting in each the food from the surrounding country. <sup>49</sup> He stored the grain in huge quantities; it was like the sand of the sea, so much that he stopped measuring: it was beyond all measure.

<sup>50</sup> Before the years of famine came, two sons were born to Joseph by Asenath daughter of Potiphara priest of On. <sup>51</sup> He named the elder Manasseh, ‘for’, he said, ‘God has made me forget all my troubles and my father’s family’. <sup>52</sup> He named the second Ephraim, ‘for’, he said, ‘God has made me fruitful in the land of my hardships’. <sup>53</sup> When the seven years of plenty in Egypt came to an end, <sup>54</sup> the seven years of famine began, as Joseph had predicted. There was famine in every country, but there was food throughout Egypt. <sup>55</sup> When the famine came to be felt through all Egypt, the people appealed to Pharaoh for food and he ordered them to go to Joseph and do whatever he told them. <sup>56</sup> When the whole land was in grip of famine, Joseph opened all the granaries and sold grain to the Egyptians, for the famine was severe. <sup>57</sup> The whole world came to Egypt to buy grain from Joseph, so severe was the famine everywhere.

### **3 The scenes**

#### **3.1 Macro scene (Gn 39–41)**

This scene shows that everything was under the control of God. The expression “the Lord was with Joseph”, repeated five times confirms this (Gn 39:2, 3, 5, 21, and 23).

The scene takes place in Potiphar’s house, in which Joseph was a slave, and is followed by many scenarios, which end with Joseph being put in prison. Imprisoned with a baker and a butler, Joseph reveals their dreams. Finally, in Pharaoh’s court, there will be deliverance. The principal actors are Potiphar and his wife, the men in their household, the warden of the prisoners, the chief butler, chief baker, Pharaoh, and Joseph himself.

#### **3.2 Micro scene**

Scene 1: Joseph introduced to the reader (Gn 39:1–6a)

Scene 2: Joseph and Potiphar’s wife (Gn 39:6b–20a)

Scene 3: Joseph in prison (Gn 39:20b–23)

Scene 4: Joseph with the baker and the cupbearer (Gn 40:1–23)

Scene 5: The Pharaoh’s dream (Gn 41:1–8)

Scene 6: The cupbearer and the Pharaoh (Gn 41:9–13)

Scene 7: Joseph and the Pharaoh (Gn 41:14–57)

## **4 The characters**

### **4.1 Relationship between Joseph and Potiphar**

The relationship between Joseph and Potiphar involves the following characters: Potiphar, his wife, the men of the household, and Joseph himself.

#### **4.1.1 Joseph**

The transforming action reveals that Joseph's character indicates two things: his fear of God and his humility as a servant. Joseph's integrity is clearly shown, and he never reveals his identity to his master. As a slave in a strange country, he is neither alone nor forsaken, because God is with him. In everything he undertakes, the Lord helps him to succeed. And Joseph found favour in his master and served him, and made him overseer over his house and put all that belonged to him in his hand. "He became a lucky man" (Jacob 1974:265) which is how people came to refer to him.

It appears that his master observed his work and discovered the source of his constant success. This shows that he was a man who had qualities which distinguished him from other slaves, especially with regard to religion and his God. This confirms that Joseph won his master's personal favour, and was appointed his personal attendant. His master granted him far-reaching authority. In fact, according to tradition, Joseph was not allowed to touch his master's bread, because Egyptians and Hebrews were not allowed to eat together. However, as Jacob (1974:265) suggests, "he cared for nothing if only the meal was on the table", and Joseph was considered to be his colleague. He never cared about the tradition, because he trusted Joseph completely. Everything was blessed, grew and multiplied in the house and field because of Joseph.

Joseph's humility was not only towards his master, but also to the whole household. In other words, Joseph did not only do his job as a servant, but, out of his fear of God, he also respected his mistress when she tried to seduce him. Joseph never accepted her suggestion, even though it

was an opportunity for Joseph to sate his sexual passions. This type of character is not applicable to everybody. As the section indicates this came to show that Joseph was in the process of transformation.

#### **4.1.2 Potiphar**

Potiphar was a courtier of Pharaoh and a captain of the guard. He was also in charge of the prison. The warden of the prison worked under him. His title, as given, shows that he was someone wealthy and a person who had accurate perceptions and good judgement. On a few occasions, he discovered in Joseph a young man who had knowledge and wisdom, and he appreciated his good qualities.

In the situation in which Joseph found himself, Potiphar's attitude in becoming angry suggests two things. Firstly, Potiphar's anger is not necessarily towards Joseph, but towards his wife. For a long time, he had found Joseph to be reliable, and he trusted him. This is not an extrapolation. However, it is supposed that he never questioned Joseph before sending him to prison. This occasion surely gave Joseph another opportunity to continue to use his proven qualities as a reliable servant. Secondly, Joseph, as a foreigner, had nothing to say after his mistress' words. The only solution was to put him in prison. In any event, Potiphar supported his wife.

#### **4.1.3 Potiphar's wife**

According to tradition, Zulaikha is the name given to Potiphar's wife (Plaut 1981:257). This name "does not appear in early Jewish sources, nor even in the Qur'an. It is apparently of Persian origin, and was popularised by post-Qur'anic Muslim writers" (Kugel 1994:61; MacDonald 1956:124). This study will sometimes refer to this name, even if it does not appear in the Bible. Potiphar's wife was a very "beautiful but tough" woman. She continually harassed Joseph, pursuing the handsome youth, and trying to have her way. When she failed in her diabolical intentions, she reacted by crying out, which, according to the law (Dt 22:24–27), would prove that she had resisted rape. She uses the expression "look at this! My husband has brought in a Hebrew to bring insult on us" (Gn 39:14). In this expression, our attention is drawn to two things. Firstly, *he'bi' la'nu* (v.14) or *hebetha la'nu* (v.17) literally means that

“he (you) brought to us”, implying an accusation or plot with regard to Potiphar, who introduced a Hebrew into house. She tried to accuse her husband of being responsible for this act. Secondly, *ibri letsaheq* literally means “to make sport” or “to mock”. These two words are negative enough to lay blame on (or plot against) the Hebrew man.

The fact is that “she would not speak so contemptuously of him before his people. But she appealed to the envy and the racial prejudice of the Egyptians, putting herself on the level of the servants and making her case theirs” (Jacob 1974:267). When her husband came home, she complained about the slave, and showed him the garment of her crime as proof. One can imagine how she tried to convince her husband: “That Hebrew slave you brought in came to my room to make me an object of insult” (Gn 39:17). In this way, she was wrong in lying to her husband. Unfortunately, her husband, by not investigating the scenario, had no choice but to agree with what his wife was saying. This is because “what a woman wants, God agrees”. The consequence of this accusation is *sohar* (v.20), which literally means a “prison”, probably a special place in which important prisoners were confined. This word only appears in Genesis. Joseph was Potiphar’s wife’s secret obsession:

She whispers her urgent desires into his ears, but take care to let no one else know; then when Joseph run away, leaving his telltale garment behind, she is obliged to reverse reality and accuse him of attempted rape –is this not in part because, fearing that the evidence of the garment now threatens to turn her private infatuation into a public scandal, she seeks to combat the truth with a, so to speak, pre-emptive lie? (Kugel 1994:28–29).

In this study’s view, Joseph’s strategy was perfect and served as proof to convince everybody, even her husband.

Some commentators argue that Joseph’s “mistress was with him in the house and sought to entice him with words every day, and she used to change clothes three times a day, day after day – the clothes that she wore in the morning she did not wear at noon, and those that she wore at noon, she did not wear in the evening – and to what purpose?” Only that he desire her... but

he overcame his desires (Kugel 1994:29).

#### **4.1.4 Men of the Household**

The men of the household only appear as witnesses; their master's wife calls them and lets them know what Joseph has done to her, showing them the proof that he was with her and then ran out. In any event, the relationship between Joseph and Potiphar will end as soon as Joseph is put in prison. The text does not say anything about Potiphar, his wife or Joseph after this incident. The injustice of the accusation made against Joseph and the posting of bail for Potiphar's wife by Potiphar himself is shown in terms of how these things lead to the transforming action. For the "ancient readers of the Joseph story, the adulterous proposal of Potiphar's wife, and Joseph's virtuous refusal to cooperate, came to loom larger and larger in the imagination" (Kugel 1994:22). As it is said, God's help appears in mysterious ways.

#### **4.2 Relationship between Joseph and two officials in prison**

Joseph's attitude or character in this section will follow him wherever he goes. His character is moulded by the "fear of God", which is the main aim of Joseph's life. After being seized and thrown into the guardhouse where the king's prisoners were kept (Gn 39:20), because the Lord was with him and kept faith with him (Gn 39:21, 23), Joseph won the favour of the governor of the guardhouse, who put him in charge of the prisoners and he directed all their work. The governor ceased to concern himself with anything entrusted to Joseph, for he succeeded in all that he did (Gn 39:22, 23). This opportunity led to the relationship with the two officials (the cupbearer called the butler and the baker) who were brought to prison.

A cupbearer was the chief male servant of a large household, who was in charge of the other servants, directed the serving of meals and was a personal attendant to the householder. In contrast, the baker was a person who made bread. Both of them were under the control of Pharaoh. The character of the butler and the baker are not clearly shown while they are in custody – they possibly committed a sin against their master. Interestingly, the text does not specify exactly what they had done. One can just say that "they offended their lord the king of Egypt" (Gn 40:1) and the nature of their offence is not mentioned. They went to prison as they had "offended" Pharaoh. The word *hath'ou* literally means "they offended", and indicates a

sinful act against someone. It could mean to set a trap, to stumble, to cause somebody to feel indignation or disgust, pain or displeasure, difficulty or discomfort, to hurt, or to commit a crime or wrongdoing (Allen 2004:970). In the case of the butler and the baker, it is possible that they failed in their respective offices.

Joseph showed kindness towards them by visiting them and also taking care of them when he found they “looked dispirited ... and were so downcast” (Gn 40:6, 7). They were given an opportunity to open themselves up to Joseph by talking about their dreams (Gn 40:5–13, 16–19). Joseph tries to remind the butler about what would happen:

When things go well with you, remember me and do me the kindness of bringing my case to Pharaoh’s notice; help me to get out of this prison. I was carried off by force from the land of the Hebrews, and here I have done nothing to deserve being put into this dungeon (Gn 40:14–15).

This attitude does not mean that Joseph is busy negotiating for his liberation, but rather shows the providence of God, one of the points which will be mentioned in the next chapter.

### **4.3 Relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh**

The relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh also engaged the magicians and the wise men in the Pharaoh’s court.

#### **4.3.1 Magicians and wise men.**

The magicians were people who were skilled in magic or sorcery, or those who used charms, incantations and spells. They were special Egyptian professionals, as related in the book of Exodus. They were the people whom Pharaoh could consult when he needed advice. In them, he could find safety and divine warning. In this scene, they were invited by Pharaoh to a special occasion in order to interpret the meaning of his dreams. Unfortunately, they were unable to satisfy Pharaoh’s needs in this particular case.

The cupbearer, who was selfish in his act, at least remembers Joseph. It seems as if he was

advised against saying anything about Joseph. No one knows the reason why he had not mentioned Joseph in the two previous years. The reason why this author says that he was advised against speaking of Joseph is because if all of them, including the magicians and wise men, are unable to interpret the Pharaoh's dreams, it could mean that Pharaoh would kill them. It was a difficult decision for him to talk about Joseph and tell the truth. Nevertheless, the cupbearer's act in mentioning Joseph to Pharaoh about what he did for them when they were in prison is really salutary for all the staff in Pharaoh's court.

#### **4.3.2 Pharaoh**

Pharaoh is a title or appellation for an ancient Egyptian king, and refers in particular to the one under whom Joseph flourished, and those under whom the oppression and exodus of Israel took place. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, Pharaoh was like a god. People praised him because of his high standing.

The night before his birthday, Pharaoh had a dream. Jacob (1974:273) found that his dream came at "a very appropriate time for a ruler solicitous of his country". "Pharaoh's spirit was restless and uncertain about the meaning of his dream" (Jacob 1974:274). It seemed to be very threatening, and his impatience did not allow him to wait for the next time that he had this dream. As an accessible man, he tried to draw his servants (magicians, wise men and officers) into the difficult situation. He learnt to listen for the right or wrong answer from them. The ability to listen to one's people (as a king) is not common to everybody – it is a gift from God. The failure of the magicians and wise men did not affect him negatively. It could be that he was hoping that God would show him the true meaning, and he seems to become more patient.

### **5 The acts**

#### **5.1 Responsibility of Joseph towards Potiphar**

##### **5.1.1 Joseph**

Just as Joseph's character and integrity have been shown, his responsibility is also clearly indicated in this section. As previously mentioned, he never shows his true identity to his master, and everything that he undertakes is made successful by the Lord. Joseph knows the job that he has to perform in his master's house. His master observes his work closely and



discovers the source of Joseph's constant success. Joseph's responsibility is to do his work as a slave well, and not to satisfy only his master. He does what God wants him to do. People are not supposed to do something under pressure. It is better to show one's skills in the various tasks that God gives one. Joseph is an example to follow – he wins his master's favour and is appointed as his personal attendant. His master grants him far-reaching authority, because he trusts him and considers him as a colleague.

Joseph's humility is not only focused on doing well, but also on respecting his master's wife. In Joseph's view, a wife is not an object or possession that can be shared with another. The fear of God involves respecting that which another man has reserved for himself. Indeed, Joseph also respects his mistress, although she has the intention of seducing him. Joseph never accepts her suggestion, and is 'obliged to break the door' in order to get out. "This too seems to be an embellishment designed to augment one's appreciation of Joseph's piety" (Kugel 1994:23). "Needless to say, his behaviour in the face of temptation is exemplary – so much so that one might even say that he was not tempted" (Kugel 1994:23). As previously mentioned, Joseph's character is not common to everybody, but rather comes from God. Because of his integrity, Joseph becomes a victim of flagrant injustice, which deprives him of his privileges. However, he never loses his honour or sins against God. This is his greatest achievement.

One can only imagine the darkness, promiscuity and vermin which were in the pit with Joseph. Nevertheless, even if his prison was full of cockroaches, the Lord was with him and stretched out His kindly hands to him. Because of this, wherever he was, the loveable nature of his personality made him popular. Jacob (1974:268) affirms that "this attraction is as an irrational power ascribed to God". All the tasks at which the prisoners did not always succeed, Joseph completed satisfactorily, because "God was with him and kept faith with him, so that he won favour of the governor of the guardhouse ... and God gave him success in all that he did" (Gn 39:21–23).

It happened that Joseph found himself in prison for no reason. The text does not suggest that Joseph had time to explain what had happened between him and his master's wife. Is it responsible or irresponsible of Joseph to keep quiet before his master? His attitude suggests two

things. Firstly, as a foreigner, he perhaps thought that Potiphar would not listen to him. Secondly, as a man of God, he thought it better to leave everything in the control of God, who would reveal the truth some day. This is why Joseph proved his worth in prison, just as he would have done in happier circumstances. God knows the extent of suffering of those who trust in Him. In spite of his status as a prisoner, and the injustice, suffering, affliction, despair and depravity of those who had lost hope or were without God, Joseph takes care of his fellow prisoners when he finds them in desperate situations. His willingness to interpret dreams shows his responsibility and devotion to helping others. He does his job of solving the problems of his companions in misfortune by interpreting their dreams, which were positive for the butler and negative for the baker. However, the butler forgot Joseph (Gn 40:23). Joseph never thought that he would remember him, because ingratitude is an Egyptian failing.

### **5.1.2 Potiphar**

As already mentioned, Potiphar is a responsible and wealthy man with good judgement. However, the criticism is that he does not check all his facts before putting Joseph in jail. It could be that he has his own reasons for doing this. Firstly, one finds his reaction or decision to be very premature. He does not investigate the situation between Joseph and his wife. According to him, his wife could not lie with Joseph, and therefore she was right, as it is said that: “prove might is right proving”. In this regard, one finds it to be irresponsible. Secondly, as a responsible man who knows his servant very well and trusts him, he is trying to “put out the fire” which is burning in his house. A responsible person is one who is supposed to first check and make sure that their decision is the right one. Before making a judgement one should acknowledge the good qualities or noble personalities of foreigners as in the case of Tamar in Genesis 38.

### **5.1.3 Potiphar’s wife**

Zulaikha is the name of Potiphar’s wife, as mentioned above. Her request, “repeated to Joseph “day after day” (Gn 39:10), is apparently interpreted here to mean that her solicitations continued over the course of an entire year! Still, Joseph resists” (Kugel 1994:23), as the wife of a high-ranking official working under Pharaoh, her actions are irresponsible. She pursues the handsome youth, trying to get him to be with her. She harasses him, but she does not in the end

tell her husband the truth. Unfortunately, her husband, by not investigating the scenario, has no choice but to agree with his wife. She thus has an irresponsible attitude. Potiphar's wife's act affects all the women in the world, and one needs to learn more about this. Some commentators, based on the history of Egypt, reveal that "[o]n one occasion the Egyptians women gathered and went to behold Joseph's beauty. What did Potiphar's wife do? She took citrons [in Hebrew '*etrogim*', a citrus fruit] and gave them to each of them and gave each a knife and then called to Joseph and stood him before them. When they beheld how handsome Joseph was, they cut their hands" (Kugel 1994:29). This act explicitly means, as she says: "if you were in my position you would not act differently" (Kugel, 1994:30). Some scholars (Gaster 1971:94; Kugel 1994:31–32, 38), by referring to some of the surate in the Qur'an (Sura XII, 30–32), provide more details about Potiphar's wife and the way she tempted her handsome servant Joseph; first by threatening him and then by wheedling and cajoling him.

#### **5.1.4 The men of the household**

The men of the household are not dealt with in any detail in the text. Did they defend Joseph from his master's anger, or did they support his mistress? The text and the scholars are quiet in this regard. Their attitude can therefore be seen as neutral.

### **5.2 Responsibility of Joseph towards the prisoners**

#### **5.2.1 Joseph**

Joseph shows himself to be responsible. He is very close to the prisoners, and is considerate of them by taking care of them, visiting them and trying to get to know more about them. There is no doubt that Joseph is worthy of his status as a responsible person.

#### **5.2.2 Chief butler and chief baker**

The responsibilities of the butler and the baker are well known. Both of them were in the king's service, and in this narrative, the baker's responsibility was to prepare food by cooking it in dry heat; on the other hand, the butler was a manservant (or head servant) who was in charge of the wine and liquor. He was also called a cupbearer. In this particular case, the butler was an officer of the royal household, who was originally the supplier of wines. The text does not indicate exactly what the butler and baker have done. It only says that "they gave offence to

their lord, the king of Egypt” (Gn 40:1–2). It is possible that they failed in their respective offices, as previously mentioned, which would have been an offence to Pharaoh. Their failure meant that they might either live or die. In their misfortune, they each have a dream. Joseph, as their companion in misfortune, comes to them and finds that their “faces are downcast today” because of the dreams of which they do not know the meanings. In the end, the effects of their irresponsibility are clearly shown.

### **5.3 Responsibility of Joseph towards Pharaoh**

The responsibility of Joseph towards Pharaoh also takes into account the responsibility of the magicians and the wise men towards Pharaoh.

#### **5.3.1 Joseph**

Joseph’s responsibility begins with his new name and the wife given to him by Pharaoh. He becomes the new personal assistant of Pharaoh and is addressed as a king. He stands before Pharaoh to receive his authority and as a prophet before God. He travels through the country of Egypt, like the sun, to take the steps he has been advised to take. The food was controlled and rationed during the seven plentiful years, in order to prevent waste. The time and manner of selling the food were determined by Joseph, as Pharaoh deferred to him. Joseph waited until an emergency was obvious, and when everyone felt the famine he opened up the storehouses. The despised Hebrew slave stood in the splendour of the court before Pharaoh’s throne. In the end, he gained sympathy through his respectful answer: “Not I, but God, can give answered which reassure Pharaoh” (Gn 41:16).

#### **5.3.2 Magicians and wise men**

The magicians’ responsibility with regard to the king was to relate and predict the future. In Pharaoh’s situation only the magicians were able to find a solution. If they could not, then the country was in danger. Unfortunately, they were unable to explain Pharaoh’s dreams. They might have tried to provide a meaning, but this did not satisfy Pharaoh. This shows irresponsibility on the magicians’ part.

#### **5.3.3 Pharaoh**

On the night before his birthday, Pharaoh had a dream, maybe the first threatening one that he had had during his time as a king. As a responsible man, he could hardly wait until the morning. He called on all the magicians and wise men to interpret his dreams. His responsibility was to obtain support and help from his people (magicians and wise men) in this difficult situation. Unfortunately, they were unable to provide a meaning.

Another important point here is the Pharaoh's attitude towards his people. He never takes any premature decision concerning his magicians and wise men. He tries to listen to what has happened. The butler gives his opinion by remembering his offence against Pharaoh, and letting him know how the young Hebrew interpreted their dreams when he says that "I was restored to my post, the other was hanged" (Gn 41:13). Humbly, Pharaoh agrees with him and sends him to fetch the young Hebrew from prison. They take Joseph hastily out of the dungeon; and when he has shaved and changed his clothes, he comes before Pharaoh (Gn 41:14). Pharaoh's patience in listening to and appreciating everything from his people shows him the way. Listening to his people is one thing, but listening to a slave is another. It is the way of knowledge: "may the wise listen and he will grant his knowledge" (Pr 1:5). The truth is known. Because of the evidence in this case and the happiness in the royal court, it was unnecessary to wait until it happened. Pharaoh makes Joseph ride in a two-seated chariot and the men cry out '*Abrech*' which literally means "bow the knee" (Jacob 1974:278), in the text "Make way! before him" (Gn 41:43). It was a sign of honour and friendship for someone sit at Pharaoh's side in the royal chariot and ride with him through the streets. Joseph was thus publicly recognised as Pharaoh's closest confidant and Pharaoh gave him a new name and a wife. As already mentioned, Joseph became closely connected to the aristocracy of the country. At this time, Joseph's responsibility, as given to him by Pharaoh, begins.

## **6 Summary**

"The transforming action" that is revealed in this section took into consideration the aspects mentioned above. This chapter is called the "transforming action" which links up with Joseph's life outside Canaan. This is a new experience in his life. From the time he was sold and brought into Egypt, Joseph was faced with some new reality. Joseph is transformed at each point of this section.

The fact Joseph finds favour by successfully managing his responsibility towards his master who made him overseer of his house and put all that belonged to him in his hands. This reveals Joseph's qualities of humility and wisdom. This indicates that the young boy was really in a process of transformation. Therefore, wisdom guides him to endure the circumstances he has to face. One can say that wisdom was at the centre of Joseph's transformation. Firstly, through his temptation, Joseph showed Potiphar's wife that yielding to her invitation to commit adultery would be a "sin before God". In this case, Joseph is different to Judah who fell in love with his daughter-in-law. The event shows Joseph's maturity because he was transformed during it. In many other cultures, adultery was merely a proprietary misdemeanour (Dt. 22:29).

Secondly, in Ancient times, dreams were thought to be signs of intent from the divine powers and were regarded as containing direct messages. An Egyptian manual of dreams contains over 200 interpretations, and for the ancient Israelites, dreams were a legitimate source of divine guidance – refer Urim and Thumim (1 Sm 28:6). Therefore, Joseph who was unable to interpret his own dreams in the initial situation is able to interpret the dreams from the jail to Pharaoh's throne. God's help comes in mysterious ways. The despised Hebrew slave stood in the splendour of the court before Pharaoh's throne. God was the source of his ability to interpret dreams. Modestly, Joseph refused to take the credit by saying that "Not I, but God, can give answered which reassure Pharaoh" (Gn 41:16). It is one of the main points of Joseph's transforming out from Canaan.

God revealed to Pharaoh what he was going to do. It was a matter of state and recognition of the royal office. After learning the meaning of these dreams, Pharaoh and his servants, as well as senior officers, such the captain of the guard and the chief butler, were delighted, while the magicians and wise men of Egypt were possibly less so. The interpretation seemed so obvious to Pharaoh that it was unnecessary to wait until it happened. Pharaoh was pleased because the interpretation touched the core of his worries as a ruler, and he must have been further pleased by the conclusions drawn by Joseph and his advice, which were inseparable from the interpretation. The nature of the interpretation, as Joseph said, demanded immediate action (Gn 41:35, 39, 40). He did not want to wait and see whether or not it would come true. The important thing that needs to be mentioned is Joseph's wisdom, which consisted of his ability

to read the soul of another person, to elucidate his vague thoughts and anxieties, and also to give practical advice. Indeed, his wisdom came from God: “he who is aware of God is humble and fearless at the same time” (Jacob 1974:280). Joseph’s interpretation of dreams begins and ends with God (Gn 41:25, 28, 32). God was the first and last subject of Joseph’s speech before looking at practical matters. Joseph’s teaching touched the heart of Pharaoh, who finally said to his servants: “can we find such a man this in whom is the spirit of God?” In fact, Egypt was seen in the ancient world as being the highest centre of knowledge. Unfortunately, the experts (wise men and magicians) in omens and dreams were unable to explain Pharaoh’s dreams.

The greatness of Joseph’s interpretation and the superiority of his wisdom in telling the truth even before the king led Joseph to occupy the same position as Pharaoh and to lead the whole kingdom, as he had originally done in the house of his first master, which had served as a preparation for him (Gn 39:9). Pharaoh’s mind was now free to speak and act officially. He was also too wise and receptive to religious ideas, and learnt a lesson from the “Semitic” slave, enthusiastically agreeing with Joseph’s advice. This ability to listen, as previously mentioned, is not common to everybody.

This transforming action enables one to learn more about Joseph’s deed in Egypt and his relationship with all Egyptians. The time and manner of selling the food were determined by Joseph, as Pharaoh deferred to him. Joseph waited until an emergency was obvious and when everyone was feeling the famine, he opened up the storehouses. Therefore, all Joseph’s acts had their basis in wisdom. One can definitely say that Joseph’s wisdom was at the centre of his transformation. This section forms a bridge from the initial situation and complication and draws us to the next chapters.

## **CHAPTER 7**

### **DENOUEMENT (Genesis 42:1–45:15)**

#### **1 Introduction**

Genesis 41:53–57 acts as a transition between the previous episode and the next episode which starts with the Joseph story in chapter 42. Genesis 42–45 draws our attention to two important things. Firstly, as Jacob (1974:283) and Wilson (2004:142) argue, “the reintroduction of (the patriarch) Jacob, who has been absent from the scene since chapter 37, which does not mean he meets Joseph in chapter 42–45”. His name is used as the subject of the sentence. Secondly, there is the quasi-absence of references to Pharaoh. However, Pharaoh is twice (Gn 42:15, 16) accidentally referred to as a conventional oath formula and once (Gn 44:18) as court flattery, according to Wilson. It is interesting to note that in the Joseph narrative, the “word Pharaoh is used 86 times, including 12 times in chapter 40 and 32 times in chapter 41” (Wilson 2004:138). This means that Pharaoh does not perform any action in chapters 42–44, despite the fact that most of these chapters are set in Egypt. This study will narrate the two trips of Joseph’s brothers to Egypt to fetch food because of the severe famine, not knowing that the one who they sold is the vizier who they are going to meet. The famine was not only in Egypt, but all over the world. People were obliged to move in order to find grain. This was also the case for Jacob’s family, who moved from Canaan to Egypt, as Humphreys (1988:41) states: “the subplot joins the main plot, as all the earth came to Egypt to buy grain”. This study will also focus on Joseph’s successful stay Potiphar’s house until he went to prison. However, God wanted salvation for mankind. Joseph’s responsibility and strategy in terms of being able to keep his feelings to himself, although he knows that they are his brothers, will also be discussed. However, as a human being, Joseph cannot continue to keep his feelings to himself without revealing himself to his brothers, especially after the hard test that they faced during their second journey. There seems to be a conflict here, but it will perhaps end with a suggestion for a resolution to this problem. This section, which is focused on the denouement, refers to the complication narrated in the last chapter. This section will deal with the scenes, followed by the pericope, which will help readers to refer to the text. Finally, the characters and the actions will lead to the conclus



## 2. Pericope

**42** When Jacob learnt that there was grain in Egypt, he said to his sons, ‘Why are you staring at each other?’ <sup>2</sup> I hear there is grain in Egypt. Go down there, and buy some for us to keep us alive and save us from starving to death.’ <sup>3</sup> So ten of Joseph’s brothers went down to buy grain from Egypt, <sup>4</sup> but Jacob did not let Joseph’s brother Benjamin go with them, for fear that he might come to harm.

<sup>5</sup> Thus the sons of Israel went with everyone else to buy grain because of the famine in Canaan. <sup>6</sup> Now Joseph was governor of the land, and it was he who sold the grain to all its people. Joseph’s brothers came and bowed to the ground before him, <sup>7</sup> and when he saw his brothers he recognized them but, pretending not to know them, he greeted them harshly. ‘Where do you come from?’ he demanded. ‘From Canaan to buy food,’ they answered. <sup>8</sup> Although Joseph had recognized his brothers, they did not recognize him. <sup>9</sup> He remembered the dreams he had had about them and said, ‘You are spies; you have come to spy out the weak points in our defenses.’ <sup>10</sup> ‘No, my lord,’ they answered; your servants have come to buy food. <sup>11</sup> We are all sons of one man. We are honest men; your servants are not spies.’ <sup>12</sup> ‘No,’ he maintained, ‘it is to spy out our weaknesses that you have come.’ <sup>13</sup> They said, ‘There were twelve of us, my lord, all brothers, sons of one man back in Canaan; the youngest is still with our father, and one is lost.’ <sup>14</sup> But Joseph insisted, ‘As I have already said to you: you are spies. <sup>15</sup> This is how you will be put to the test: unless your youngest brother comes here, I swear by the life of Pharaoh you shall not leave this place. <sup>16</sup> Send one of your number to fetch your brother; the rest of you will remain in prison. Thus your story will be tested to see whether you are telling the truth. If not, then by the life of Pharaoh you must be spies. <sup>17</sup> With that he kept them in prison for three days. <sup>18</sup> On the third day Joseph said to them, ‘Do what I said and your lives will be spared, for I am a god-fearing man: <sup>19</sup> if you are honest men, only one of you brothers shall be kept in prison, while the rest of you may go and take grain for your starving households; <sup>20</sup> but you must bring your youngest brother to me. In this way your words will be proved true, and you will not die.’ <sup>21</sup> They consented, and among themselves they said, ‘No doubt we are being punished because of our brother. He saw his distress when he pleaded with us and we refused to listen. That is why this distress has come on us.’ <sup>22</sup> Reuben said, ‘Did I not warn you not to do wrong to the boy? But you would not listen, and now his blood is on our heads, and we must pay.’ <sup>23</sup> They did not know that Joseph understood, since he had used an interpreter. <sup>24</sup> Joseph turned away from them and wept. Then he went back to speak to them, and took Simeon from among them and had him bound before their eyes. <sup>25</sup> He gave orders to fill their bags with grain, to put each man’s silver back into his sack again, and to give them provisions for the journey. After this had been done, <sup>26</sup> they loaded their grain on their donkeys and set off. <sup>27</sup> When stopped for the night, one of them opened his sack to give feed to his donkey, and there at the top was the silver. <sup>28</sup> He said to his brothers, ‘My silver has been returned; here it is in my pack.’ Bewildered and trembling, they asked one another, ‘What is this that God has done to us?’

<sup>29</sup> When they came to their father Jacob in Canaan, they gave him an account of all that had happened to them. They said: <sup>30</sup> the man who is lord of the country spoke harshly to us and made out that we were spies. <sup>31</sup> But we said to him, “We are honest men, we are not spies. <sup>32</sup> There were twelve of us, all brothers, sons of the same father.

One was disappeared, and the youngest is with our father in Canaan.”<sup>33</sup> Then the man, the lord of the country, said to us, “This is how I shall discover if you are honest men: leave one of your brothers with me, take food for your starving households and go; <sup>34</sup> bring your youngest brother to me, and I shall know that you are honest men and not spies. Then I shall restore your brother to you, and you can move around the country freely”<sup>35</sup> But on emptying their sacks, each of them found his silver inside, and when they and their father saw the bundles of silver, they were afraid. <sup>36</sup> Their father Jacob said to them, ‘You have robbed me of my children. Joseph is lost; Simeon is lost; and now you would take Benjamin. Everything is against me.’ <sup>37</sup> Reuben said to his father, ‘You may put both my sons to death if I do not bring him back to you. Entrust him to me, and I shall bring him back.’ <sup>38</sup> But Jacob said, ‘My son must not go with you, for his brother is dead and he alone is left. Should he come to any harm on the journey, you will bring down my grey hairs in sorrow to the grave.’

**43** The famine was still severe in the land. <sup>2</sup> When the grain they had bought from Egypt was all used up, their father said to them, ‘Go again and buy some more grain for us to eat.’ <sup>3</sup> Judah replied, ‘But the man warned us that we must not go into his presence unless our brother was with us. <sup>4</sup> If you let our brother go with us, we will go down and buy you food. <sup>5</sup> But if you will not let him, we cannot go, for the man declared, “You shall not come into my presence unless your brother is with you.”’ <sup>6</sup> Israel said, ‘Why have you treated me so badly by telling the man that you had another brother?’ They answered, <sup>7</sup> ‘The man questioned us closely about ourselves and our family: “Is your father still alive?” he asked, “Have you a brother?” and we answered his questions. How were we to know he would tell us to bring our brother down?’ <sup>8</sup> Judah said to Israel his father, Send the boy with me; then we can start at once, and save everyone’s life, ours, yours, and those of our children. <sup>9</sup> I shall go surety for him, and you may hold me responsible. If I do not bring him back and restore him to you, you can blame me for it all my life. <sup>10</sup> If we had not wasted all this time, we could have made the journey twice by now.’ <sup>11</sup> Their father Israel said to them, ‘If it must be so, then do this: in your baggage take, as a gift for the man, some of produce for which our country is famous: a little balm and honey, with gum tragacanth, myrrh, pistachio nuts, and almonds. <sup>12</sup> Take double the amount of silver with you in your packs; perhaps there was some mistake. <sup>13</sup> Take your brother with you and go straight back to the man. <sup>14</sup> May God Almighty make him kindly disposed to you, may he send back the one whom you left behind and Benjamin too. As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved. <sup>15</sup> So they took the gift and double the amount of silver, and accompanied by Benjamin they started at once for Egypt, where they presented themselves to Joseph.

<sup>16</sup> When Joseph saw Benjamin with them, he said to his steward, ‘Bring these men indoors; then kill a beast and prepare a meal, for they are to eat with me at midday.’ <sup>17</sup> He brought the men into Joseph’s house as he had been ordered. <sup>18</sup> They were afraid because they had been brought there; they thought, ‘We have been brought in here because of that affair of the silver which was replaced in our packs the first time. He means to make some charge against us, to inflict punishment on us, seize our donkeys, and make us slaves.’ <sup>19</sup> So they approached Joseph’s steward and spoke to him at the door of the house. <sup>20</sup> ‘Please listen, my lord,’ they said. ‘After our first visit to buy food, <sup>21</sup> when we reached the place where we were to spend the night, we opened our packs and each of us found

his silver, the full amount of it, at the top of his pack. We have brought it back with us,<sup>22</sup> and we have more silver to buy food. We do not know who put the silver in our packs.’<sup>23</sup> He answered, ‘Calm yourselves; do not be afraid. It must have been your God, the God of your father, who hid treasure for you in your packs. I did receive the silver.’ Then he brought out Simeon to them.<sup>24</sup> The steward conducted them into Joseph’s house and gave them water to bathe their feet, and provided feed for their donkeys.<sup>25</sup> They had their gifts ready against Joseph’s arrival at midday, for they had heard that they were to eat there.<sup>26</sup> When he came into the house, they presented him with the gifts which they had brought, bowing to the ground before him.<sup>27</sup> He asked them how they were and said, ‘Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?’<sup>28</sup> Yes, my lord, our father is still alive and well,’ they answered, bowing low in obeisance.<sup>29</sup> When Joseph looked around he saw his own mother’s son, his brother Benjamin, and asked, ‘Is your youngest brother, of whom you told me?’ and to Benjamin he said, ‘May God be gracious to you, my son!’<sup>30</sup> Joseph, suddenly overcome by his feelings for his brother, was almost in tears, and he went into the inner room and wept.<sup>31</sup> Then, having bathed his face, he came out and, with his feeling now under control; he ordered the meat to be served.<sup>32</sup> He was served by himself, and the brothers by themselves; the Egyptians who were at the meal were also served separately, for to Egyptians it is abhorrent to eat with Hebrews.<sup>33</sup> When at his direction the brothers were seated, the eldest first and so on down to the youngest, they looked at another in astonishment.<sup>34</sup> Joseph sent them each a portion from what was before him, but Benjamin’s portion was five times larger than any of the others. So they feasted and drank with him.

**44** Joseph gave the steward these instructions: ‘Fill the men’s packs with food, as much as they can carry, and put each man’s silver at the top of his pack.’<sup>2</sup> And put my goblet, the silver one, at the top of the youngest brother’s pack along with the silver for the grain.’ He did as Joseph had told him.<sup>3</sup> At first light the brothers were allowed to take their donkeys and set off;<sup>4</sup> but before they had gone very far from city, Joseph said to his steward, ‘Go after those men at once, and when you catch up with them, say, “Why have you repaid good with evil?”<sup>5</sup> Why have you stolen the silver goblet? It is the one my lord drinks from, and which he uses for divination. This is a wicked thing you have done.”’<sup>6</sup> When the steward overtook them, he reported his master’s words.<sup>7</sup> But they replied, ‘My lord, how can you say such things? Heaven forbid that we should do such a thing!’<sup>8</sup> Look! The silver we found at the top of our packs we brought back to you from Canaan. Why, then, should we steal silver or gold from your master’s house?’<sup>9</sup> If any one of us is found with the goblet, he shall die; and, what is more, my lord, the rest of us shall become your slaves.’<sup>10</sup> He said, ‘Very well; I accept what you say. Only the one in whose possession it is found will become my slave; the rest will go free.’<sup>11</sup> Each quickly lowered his pack to the ground and opened it,<sup>12</sup> and when the steward searched, beginning with the eldest and finish with the youngest, the goblet was found in Benjamin’s pack.<sup>13</sup> At this they tore their clothes; then one and all they loaded their donkeys and returned to the city.<sup>14</sup> Joseph was still in the house when Judah and his brothers arrived and they threw themselves on the ground before him.<sup>15</sup> Joseph said, ‘What is this you have done? You might have known that a man such as I am uses divination.’<sup>16</sup> Judah said, ‘What can we say, my lord? What can we plead, or how can we clear ourselves? God has uncovered our crime. Here we are, my lord, ready to be made your slaves, we ourselves as well as the one who was found with the goblet.’<sup>17</sup> Heaven forbid that I should do such a thing!’ answered Joseph. ‘Only the one who

was found with the goblet shall become my slave; the rest of you can go home to your father safe and sound.’<sup>18</sup> Then Judah went up to him and said, ‘Please listen, my lord, and let your servant speak a word, I beg. Do not be angry with me, for you are as great as Pharaoh himself.’<sup>19</sup> My lord, you asked us whether we had a father or a brother.<sup>20</sup> We answered, “We have an aged father, and he has a young son born in his old age; this boy’s full brother is dead, and since he alone is left of his mother’s children, his father loves him.”<sup>21</sup> You said to us, your servants “Bring him down to me so that I may set eyes on him.”<sup>22</sup> We told you, my lord, that the boy could not leave his father; his father would die if he left him.<sup>23</sup> But you said, “Unless your youngest brother comes down with you, you shall not enter my presence again.”<sup>24</sup> We went back to your servant my father, and reported to him what your lordship had said,<sup>25</sup> so when our father told us to go again and buy food,<sup>26</sup> we answered, “We cannot go down, for without our youngest brother we cannot enter the man’s presence; but if our brother is with us, we will go.”<sup>27</sup> Then your servant my father said to us, “You know that my wife bore me two sons.<sup>28</sup> One left me, and I said, “He must have been torn to pieces. I have not seen him since.”<sup>29</sup> If you take this one from me as well, and he comes to any harm, then you will bring down my grey hairs in misery to the grave.”<sup>30</sup> Now, my lord, if I return to my father without the boy – and remember, his life is bound up with the boy’s-<sup>31</sup> what will happen is this: he will see that the boy is not with us and he will die, and your servants will have brought down our father’s grey hairs in sorrow to the grave.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, my lord, it was I who went surety for the boy to my father. I said, “If I do not bring him back to you, then you can blame me for it all my life.”<sup>33</sup> Now, my lord, let me remain in place of the boy as my lord’s slave, and let him go with his brothers.<sup>34</sup> How can I return to my father without the boy? I could not bear to see the misery which my father would suffer.’

**45** Joseph was no longer able to control his feelings in front of all his attendants and he called, ‘Let everyone leave my presence!’ There was nobody present when Joseph made himself known to his brothers,<sup>2</sup> but he wept so loudly that the Egyptians heard him, and news of it got to Pharaoh’s household.<sup>3</sup> Joseph said to his brothers, ‘I am Joseph! Can my father be still alive? They were so dumbfound at finding themselves face to face with Joseph that they could not answer.’<sup>4</sup> Joseph said to them, ‘Come close to me,’ and when they did so, he said, ‘I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt.’<sup>5</sup> Now, do not be distressed or blame yourselves for selling me into slavery here; it was to save lives that God sent ahead of you.<sup>6</sup> For there have now been two years of famine in the land, and there will be another five years with neither ploughing nor harvest.<sup>7</sup> God sent me on ahead of you to ensure that you will have descendants on earth, and to preserve for you a host of survivors.<sup>8</sup> It is clear that it was not you who sent me here, but God, and he has made me Pharaoh’s chief counsellor, lord over his whole household and ruler of Egypt.<sup>9</sup> Hurry back to my father and give him this message from his son Joseph: “God has made me lord of all Egypt. Come down to me without delay.”<sup>10</sup> You will leave in the land of Goshen and be near me, you, your children and grandchildren, your flocks and herds, and all that you have.<sup>11</sup> I shall provide for you there and see that you and your household and all that you have are not reduced to want; for there are still five years of famine to come.”<sup>12</sup> You can see for yourselves, and so can my brother Benjamin, that is really Joseph himself who is speaking to you.<sup>13</sup> Tell my father of all the honour which I enjoy in Egypt, tell him all you have seen, and bring him down here with all speed.’<sup>14</sup> He threw his arms round his brother Benjamin and wept, and Benjamin too embraced him weeping.<sup>15</sup> He then kissed each of his brothers and wept over them; after that his

brothers were able to talk with him.

### **3 The scenes**

#### **3.1 Macro scene**

This scene is very interesting when one considers the previous one. Because of his dreams, Joseph is compelled to go from Canaan via Dothan to Egypt, and then from prison to power. Now a journey will bring “ten brothers from Canaan to Egypt and from a simple request for food to a plea for a youngest brother’s life and the life of their father as well” (Humphreys 1988:41). Joseph has not seen his family for at least twenty-five years. He is now second-in-command over all Egypt, and controls the food supply to the entire world. His responsibility is to buy and sell grain. In this section, some ironic reversal, which constitutes the plot to be developed up to Genesis 45, is evident, as Mann suggests: “thus those who sold their brother into slavery come to him (unknowingly) to buy grain” (Mann 1988:70). This section, the so-called denouement, refers to the complication as narrated in the last chapter. It starts with Joseph’s elevation and his brothers’ journeys to Egypt to fetch grain, followed by Joseph’s test, and ends with Joseph revealing himself to his brothers.

#### **3.2 Micro scene**

Scene 1: Joseph and brothers (1): Genesis 42:1–28

Scene 2: Joseph’s brothers back to Canaan: Genesis 42:29–38

Scene 3: Joseph and brothers (2): Genesis 43:1–34

Scene 4: Joseph’s brothers brought back for the trial: Genesis 44:1–45:15

Scene 5: The verdict of the trial: Genesis 45:1–15

### **4 The characters**

This section of the narrative will deal very sensitively with the relationship between Joseph and his brothers (the test that they never expected will be discussed here), between the brothers and their father (when they went back to Canaan and reported to him), and finally, between Joseph and his father (Joseph missed him and asked his brothers about his father’s health). The study of their characters and acts will link up with the complication previously developed.

.

## 4.1 The relationship between Joseph and his brothers

### 4.1.1 Joseph

There are three aspects to Joseph's character: firstly, he speaks very roughly; secondly, as a human being, he is sometimes emotional; and thirdly, he is constant in his decisions. This section will also try to develop his character. The narrator suggests that Joseph was looking for his brothers. The repetition of the verbs *wayyakirem* and *wayyitnaker* seems to refer to the same words: "know them or recognize them". Both of these verbs come from the verb *nakar*, which means "imperfect". Wenham, in this regard, suggests that Genesis 42:7–8 echoes Genesis 37, because of the repetition of the root *nakar* (used in Gn 37:32), as well as pretending to a play on words when the brothers plotted in Genesis 37:18. The use of these echoes, he suggests, "indicates that Joseph's seemingly strong treatment of his brothers is simply a matter of mirroring their earlier actions towards him" (Wilson 2004:145). The words *wayyedaber itam qasoth* are often translated as "he spoke harshly" or "roughly" (Gn 42:7). Hamilton adds that "Joseph did speak to his brothers roughly and argues that rough words are redemptive words" (Hamilton 1982:134; Wilson 2004:145).

However, the thrust of the matter appears to be that he did not treat them as one would treat brothers, but simply played the role of an Egyptian official. These two fundamental points refer to the complication which relates to chapter 4 of our study. Is Joseph seeking vengeance, reconciliation, punishment or something else? Some scholars "have proposed that Joseph is acting vindictively here, seeking to exact revenge on his brothers. This seems to be supported by the unfounded accusations against and imprisonment of his brothers" (Wilson 2004:145). According to Arnold (1998:158), "Joseph decided to put them through a few tests to find out their character", by the way in which "he decided to detain Simeon as a hostage while they returned to Canaan, in order to bring his brother, Benjamin, to Egypt". On the other hand, the motive of revenge does not explain the language of testing (Gn 42:15–16) or "Joseph letting nine of the brothers go free" (Gn 42:19–20). "Joseph acts in such a way as to bring Benjamin into his presence". Many scholars suggest "that this was a genuine test, not of whether or not the brothers are telling the truth, but rather of whether or not they have changed" (Wilson 2004:146). Redford (1970:150) argues that "he does not test whether they are spies for he knows that they are not. He tests whether they are the same old brothers or whether perhaps an

inner change has occurred in them". Joseph's test of his brothers becomes complicated as it was developed around his brothers' attitude towards him when they were deciding to kill him or to sell him into Egypt. This section really links up with the complication action perpetrated previously by the brothers on Joseph. However, there is no doubt that as a powerful vizier, Joseph disguises his face and dress by playing the role of a foreigner. He assumes the identity of an Egyptian, only speaking to them through an interpreter (Gn. 42:23). In any event, Joseph does not do what seems to be obvious, but rather treats them as strangers. There may be parallelism between the way Joseph treats his brothers and the way his brothers treated him in last chapter. Is it possible to speculate that Joseph's actions are motivated by revenge? He wants to make his brothers suffer for what they have done to him, and this certainly happens. However, one wonders about his intentions and motives in this scene, since, as the saying goes, "a foreigner who drinks of the waters of the Nile forgets his native land" (Egyptian proverb). In fact, Joseph does not intend to punish them, but rather to test them in order to determine if they are telling him the truth, by proving their honesty to him. It seems as if Joseph is trying to reveal their present character, but "the suffering and crises into which he wants to lead them are to discipline the brothers further and more severely and to chasten them" (Von Rad 1972:383).

To send only one of his brothers home would affect their father and might thwart the return of this one with Benjamin. He decides to detain Simeon as a hostage while they return to Canaan in order to bring his brother Benjamin to Egypt. According to Plaut (1981:272), "Joseph took his brother Simeon as hostage, possibly because he was the one who had suggested that Joseph be killed. Thus punishment is exacted and the scales of justice begin to balance". This parallels the event related in the complication action when his brothers took his tunic to his father. "Joseph strikes the brothers' emotions, while the one who is thought to be dead stands shaken before them, and this is extremely beautiful" (Von Rad 1972:383).

Many critics question what Joseph is really weeping about. This study suggests that he might be experiencing pangs of conscience about what his brothers did to him. It "reveals something of the inner turmoil that Joseph is experiencing, and implies that he still has a real affection for his brothers" (Wilson 2004:153). It is an expression of remorse. As already mentioned, the replacement of the money in the sacks of his brothers is a big issue for them, a real

predicament. This does not mean that Joseph forgets about it, but it is for him “a sign of his deeply veiled love which makes them so great a gift” (Von Rad 1972:384). Unfortunately, it is both enigmatic and frightening for them. This gift, according to Joseph, not only affects his brothers, but also so deeply dismays Jacob that he cannot bear it (Gn 42:36–37). “Jacob speaks with the pathos of his descent to Sheol, the realm of the dead” (Von Rad 1972:384).

Joseph’s attitude causes one to ponder several questions. Why does he not immediately disclose his identity, embrace his brothers, and summon his father and Benjamin to Egypt? Why, at the very moment that he remembers his old dreams, does he devise the false accusation that the brothers are spies (Gn 42:9)? The denouement reveals also the postponement of the revelation. What about the terrible trap of putting the silver cup in Benjamin’s sack until they were on trial? These aspects need to be re-examined. Joseph does not show what he wants from his brothers. He knows them, so what does he expect from them? This aspect will reveal Joseph’s real responsibility.

#### **4.1.2 Joseph’s brothers**

Certainly, starvation is facing the brothers and they all know that there is grain in Egypt, but they do not know how to broach the subject with their father. “Will he let them go or may it not remind him of the sad plight of Joseph” (Jacob 1974:283). The narrator suggests that the brothers went to Egypt with many others, similar to the way in which the “Asiatic who did not know from what they would live” is pictured on the famous ancient Egyptian grave relief as bowing before the general Haremhad ca. 1330 (Von Rad 1972:382). The moment came when Joseph was in charge of all the land and had risen to a position of prominence and power. The brothers then meet the powerful vizier at the wheat market. It is only natural for them not to recognise him in these completely strange surroundings, since they definitely do not expect to see him in this place. Unfortunately, the brothers, now nine in number, return home in a scene that recalls the time many years (around twenty-five) before when they returned home to their father with one of their number missing, this time not bringing the bloodied cloak, as was the case then in the complication action, but with the unsettling discovery of their money. Are they to be suspected as being thieves as well? They “appear again before their father without one of their brothers, and what they once unsympathetically observed, as the ‘distress of the soul’ of



the one they now find impossible to bear” (Von Rad 1972:383). The evil which they did long ago has now resurfaced all of a sudden and turned on the perpetrators. They immediately recognise the connection (Von Rad 1972:383). The accusation reveals their crime against their brother, whom they had sold. It is like the saying: what a man sows, so shall he reap. After this they do not tell their father what they did twenty-five years ago.

Reuben appears to reveal the past as he complains in the complication action, but this has no effect on them. Unfortunately, the second journey will be the same scenario, but with a different test. On their way home, they are overtaken and faced with the fact of having committed a crime of which they are innocent (Westermann 1996:86). Central to the accusation is the question: “why have you repaid good with evil?” (Gn 44:4) The replacement of money in the brothers’ sacks is a real predicament. After they had begun to relax because of the “friendly reception and fulfilment of their anxious requests, this is a surprise which once more pulls the ground out from under their feet. They are once again defenceless in the hands of the powerful man” (Westermann 1996:86). Knowing that they are really innocent of that of which they have been accused, and in order to defend themselves, they take the oath that “if anyone of us is found with the goblet, he shall die” (Gn 44:9). However, “this indignant insistence on their innocence tends to exacerbate their powerlessness” (Westermann 1996:86).

Unfortunately, as the saying goes: “might is right”, and the cup is found in Benjamin’s sack. Unanimously, the brothers’ action is punctual: “they tore their clothes; then one and all they loaded their donkeys and returned to the city” (Gn 44:13). The genuineness of the brothers’ grief is shown by their responsibility in this situation. Thus, they prefer to return to Joseph’s house rather than to go home in solidarity with their youngest brother, Benjamin. They “then reaffirm their intention to stay with Benjamin” (Wilson 2004:165). This really shows that “their actions indicate a change in character, which leads to focus in their words” (Wilson 2004:165). The tearing of their clothes is a sign of their genuine grief. This can be compared to the complication when Jacob heard that his son Joseph was no more: “He tore his clothes” (Gn 37:34). The expression *athah kedibereikem*, translated as “let it be as you say” (Gn 44:10), is a trap for the brothers. It is also an expression of justice. Both (the steward who represents Joseph and the brothers) were saying: “let, the time will be told” or “the right will be known”. The

steward says that “only the one in whose possession it is found will become my slave; the rest will go free” (Gn 44:10). As an emissary, he speaks in the place of his master, who has sent him. Furthermore, the bogus crime is indeed discovered. One can imagine the reaction of the brothers, who are completely reduced to silence, because they were now in his clutches. No one was able to say anything, because they had been caught red-handed. Westermann (1996:87) describes this as “the portrayal of an appeal to a superior court”. Once again, the brothers stand before Joseph. He repeats the accusation. There is a contrast between the confession of guilt in Genesis 44:7–9, and the practical situation of guilt in Genesis 44:13–16. It really seems like a misunderstanding. Judah’s reply is that it is difficult to respond to the bogus accusation: “God has found out the guilt of your servants”, therefore nothing can be done. His reaction also seems to suggest that “God has revealed what the brothers have sought to conceal”. The brothers know that they are innocent of the theft of the cup, but they have been declared guilty, because of the proof of the cup found in the sack of Benjamin, their youngest brother. This is “a test that reaches the very core of the issue at stake” (Von Rad 1972:393; Sarna 1989:223; Fretheim 1994:639), although Wilson (2004:166) makes some comparisons in this regard, and argues that “like the judgment of Solomon, the sudden threat to Benjamin was a thrust to the heart in the moment the brothers stood revealed” In fact, it is suddenly no longer certain that the brothers are innocent in this matter.

In any event, whether they are guilty or innocent, the brothers are in a predicament. This is the climactic point of Joseph’s plan to see if his brothers have changed, and to determine the “effect of separating Benjamin from his brothers and making him vulnerable” (Wilson 2004:164). While the reader knows where the cup is hidden, the brothers try to make an offer that the thief be put to death and the rest become slaves (Gn 43:9). As the latter have already left, this is a trap of which the brothers are unaware. Many scholars “see Joseph’s actions as being despotic and cruel” (Coats 1976:83; Wilson 2004:164-165). However, Wilson (2004:163) by referring to Speiser (1964:335) asks this important question: “Would the brothers revert to type, and welcome the opportunity to leave Benjamin out this time with a genuine excuse?” This is beyond this study’s scope, but justifies learning more about Joseph’s behaviour. Further research needs to be conducted, in order to determine exactly what was going on in Joseph’s mind during this speech. Unfortunately, the punishment is declared to be

only for the youngest brother.

However, this does not matter to Judah. Standing up for his brothers, he asks to speak, because he is the one who is responsible for his youngest brother, and it is he who will be questioned by his father and will have to answer to him. Judah is serious about his decision, and is empowered now to speak. It is responsible for one to defend oneself when there is a problem. As Westermann (1996:88) says, “speech and responsibility are closed associated”. Judah appears to be his brothers’ defender, as he was the one who suggested selling Joseph rather than killing him. If Judah does not say anything in his report about his brothers’ crime, it is because he wants to save his brother by trying to convince the “man” when he reminds him that if “he [Jacob] will see that the boy is not with us and he will die, and your servants will have brought down our father’s grey hairs in sorrow to the grave” (Gn.44:31). In this case, one sees that Judah assumes, together with his brothers, responsibility for saving his brother by referring to his father “your servants... to sheol”. With these words, Judah is clearly suggesting that something has changed. He is speaking in the capacity of a responsible spokesman for all his brothers (Westermann 1996:89). One does not find Judah begging the Egyptian lord for grace – he accepts guilt, and thereby also punishment. His plea has only to do with a concern that the punishment is falling onto the wrong person, and he wishes to take it upon himself (Westermann 1996:90).

Although scholars have speculated about Judah’s character, there is no character change in Judah, but rather a decision to act differently towards his brother in the midst of a crisis. He speaks as he does, simply, because of his oath of surety and a fear for his father’s life (Coats 1976:43). However, Judah’s willingness to offer himself as surety indicates a substantial change. Thus, although he does not change his character, he has at least managed to acquire wisdom-like traits. In any event, they find that, “while Judah has become a skilful orator, he is portrayed in the narrative as genuinely repentant” (Wilson 2004:170-171). Just as Judah was the key actor “in the betrayal of Joseph, so he is the one who takes the initiative to sacrifice himself for the favoured younger brother” (Wenham 1994:431).

#### **4.2 The relationship between the brothers and their father**

#### 4.2.1 Jacob

In the chapters involving the episode of Judah and Tamar (Gn 38) and those set in Egypt (Gn 39–41), Jacob seems to be quiet. However, one knows that his son has been brought to Egypt and his disappearance was painful for Jacob. He believes that Joseph will not be found and is either lost, dead or in the Sheol. Jacob is waiting to go to Sheol one day, where he believes his son is. He is like someone who has been condemned, and appears as a man approaching the brink of death (Gn 37:35 cp. 42:38).

Therefore, he was not prepared to send his last son, Benjamin, with his brothers to take some food to Egypt, “for fear that he might come to harm” (Gn 42:4). As a father, Jacob clearly feels the grip of famine, and he tries to read the eyes of his sons when he states: “why do you stare at each another?” (Gn 42:1). Looking at one another could mean that they were seemingly content, as if they lacked nothing, or it could mean that they were undecided as to who should take the initiative. Jacob orders his sons to go to Egypt for grain, “to keep us alive and save us from starving to death” (Gn 42:2). His remark is limited to physical survival, but “as the story progresses, live and not die will come to signify the survival of God’s purpose for the world” (Mann 1988:70).

Jacob’s character is linked to Benjamin, and he therefore begs for the mercy of Almighty God, and this betrays the deeper hope, beyond the expressed hope, of this still bereaved father. Jacob is placed at the centre of all that is harmful. An important thing to be noted is the attitude of Jacob after returning from the first journey, when he says that “You have robbed me of my children. Joseph is lost; Simeon is lost; and now you would take Benjamin ...” (Gn 42:36). One could say that Jacob was not selfish – although he was focusing on the loss of Joseph, he was also thinking about his other children. This is an appropriate attitude for the master of a family. Jacob was in no hurry to take this test until his family was once again facing starvation. However, the pleading of his sons with the genuine promise of Reuben (Gn 42:37) led Jacob in time to allow Benjamin to accompany his brothers on a second journey. It was a shock for him to lose the one that he loves: “My son shall not go down with you, for his brother is dead, and he only left” (Gn 42:38). As von Rad (1972:384) says, “Jacob speaks with pathos of his descent to sheol, the realm of the dead. Everyone knew that the dead lay in the family grave”. In fact, it

is “bad to die in such sorrow and not in a good old age, because it was then possible that the spirit of the dead would find no rest” (Von Rad 1972:384). Reuben is reminded that the way in which Jacob allows Benjamin to go is a

... fine blend of the practical and a dramatic resignation filled with excess of emotion” (Humphreys 1988:78), when Jacob says that “if it must be so, then do this: in your baggage take, as a gift for the man, some product for which our country is famous: a little balm and honey, with gum tragacanth, myrrh, pistachio nuts and almonds... take also your brother with you and go straight back to the man. May God Almighty make him kindly disposed to you ... As for me, if I am bereaved, I am bereaved (Gn 43:11–14).

#### **4.2.2 Brothers**

In the initial situation (Gn 37:1–11), the brothers’ characters are revealed through them hating, smouldering and conspiring against Joseph, and also by covering their tracks in order to deceive their father. For them, it was an attempt to get rid of Joseph. In this episode, the character of Joseph’s brothers is clearly defined. The aim is to present them as the least complex of the major figures in the Joseph story, and the least ambiguous in terms of what their words and deeds represent. In this way, the brothers appear to be the most transparent of all the major figures in the story, with Jacob in the middle, and Joseph as the most opaque (Humphreys 1988:81). As a group of simple men, already stumbling, they find themselves hopelessly out of their depth in the court of the grand vizier of Egypt. They are clearly overwhelmed after having sold their brother. Therefore, when they are suddenly accused, they try to blurt out not only denial, but also much more information than is necessary, by saying that one of them was to inform Joseph of the existence of Benjamin. They are really like “fish taken in the net”. Joseph treats them as spies, but they reply by giving more and more information about their family: “No, My lord ... we are all sons of one man. We are honest men; your servants are not spies, we were twelve of us, all brothers sons of one man back in Canaan; the youngest is still with our father, and one is lost” (Gn 42:10–13). The repetition of “we” indicates that all of them agree on what is being said. One can determine their character from the expression *we ha’ehad ei’nenou*, which literally means “one is lost”. How can they

justify the absence of the one who is lost? The selling of Joseph was in fact kept a secret between the brothers and reveals their character in the complication. The only thing that their father knows is that Joseph has been devoured by a beast in the wilderness. How could Jacob know that Joseph was sold in Egypt? In their report from Egypt, they did not let their father know that Joseph had not been devoured by a wild beast, but had rather been sold in Egypt. How can one analyse the trust between the brothers and their father when they tell him that Joseph is alive? Do they immediately tell the truth to their father about selling Joseph? The question as to whether Joseph was dead or alive is confusing for Jacob. What kind of surprise will he get?

The effect here is one of simple innocence, in contrast to the culpability of their early encounter with Joseph, when they saw him from afar and did not recognise him. They plead innocence before the accusation of this Egyptian vizier, but are guilty in conversation with each other: “we saw his distress when he pleaded with us and we refused to listen” (Gn 42:21). One finds remorse in their explanation, which opens them up to their earlier fears, since affliction brings remorse: “what did we do to deserve this?” Joseph’s brothers are faced with a predicament when they remember what they did to their brother, who has since become a vizier in Egypt, something that they had never expected. Their remorse is so deep that they do not know what to say or how to defend themselves.

On their second journey, the ten brothers go to Egypt to stand before Joseph (Gn 43:16). When they are taken to Joseph’s house, they feel more and more guilty (Gn 43:28s), but Joseph’s words: “calm yourselves; do not be afraid” (Gn 43:23) make them feel secure, since, for the guilty, even hospitality can seem ominous. When their fears have been calmed, they stay with Joseph. However, when they are returning, and it is discovered that the vizier’s cup was in Benjamin’s sack, they try to defend themselves by telling the truth and referring to their previous mistake (Gn 44:7–9). The haste with which they are prepared to search for the cup is in line with their character. However, the important thing to note here is the attitude of Reuben, as the eldest, when his father tries to accuse them. He finds an excuse to avoid this situation by separating himself from their crime when he says: “Did I not warn you” (Gn 42:22). Their words tumble out in brief phrases, with no clear order, having their impact through, as well as

not through, any artful sequence (Gn 44:18–34).

### **4.3 The relationship between Joseph and his father**

Joseph's relationship with his father in this section is not specifically discussed. Instead, he is mentioned at various times in relation to another person. Firstly, in his sorrow, he refuses to let Benjamin go with his brothers, because "his brother is dead and he alone is left" (Gn 42:38). Jacob refers to Joseph when he remembers the way in which he disappeared, and he is feeling the pain deep down inside when he says for the second time: "One left me ... I have not seen him since" (Gn 44:28). Secondly, Judah mentions Joseph when he tries to explain to his father what had happened between them and the man (Gn 43:7). However, in referring to the text itself, Judah's mention of his father is omitted from the conversation between Joseph and his brothers. The clearest mention of Jacob is made when Joseph and his brothers meet for the second time in Joseph's house. This seems to be when they feel at peace and are secure: "Is your father well, the old man of whom you spoke? Is he still alive?" (Gn 43:27). Another opportunity arises when the brothers have returned and go to trial. Judah, standing up before Joseph at the trial, tries to convince Joseph with the following words: "Please listen, my lord" (Gn 44:18–34). This is in order to explain Jacob's feelings for his two sons, because of there being only one left. The last mention of the relationship between Joseph and his father is explicitly made by Joseph himself when the verdict is made in the brothers' favour, at which point he claims: "Hurry back to my father and give him this message from his son Joseph ... Tell my father of all the honour which I enjoy in Egypt, tell him all you have seen, and bring him down here with all speed" (Gn 45:9, 13). Other references to this relationship, such as "the rest of you can go home to your father safe and sound" (Gn 44:17), are made by Joseph himself.

## **5 The acts**

### **5.1 Responsibility of Joseph and his father**

In this section, the responsibility of Joseph towards his father is not clearly defined. Therefore, following the verdict in favour of his brothers, Joseph is recognised as the saviour of the whole world, as well as his family from Canaan. It is emphasised that he wants to let his father know about his high position as second-in-command of the land of Egypt. His responsibility is shown

when he orders his brothers to go and fetch his father from Canaan (Gn 45:9, 13). In order to convince his father, he does not stop at these orders. As proof, he sends Benjamin with them (Gn 45:12). Joseph's responsibility towards his father is to take the opportunity to bring his father from Canaan to Egypt in order to save his father from inevitable starvation.

## **5.2 Responsibility of Joseph and his brothers**

Joseph's responsibilities involve not only Joseph and his brothers, but also take into account Joseph's servant, the steward, who plays an important role in this section.

### **5.2.1 Joseph's servant (the steward)**

Joseph's steward plays the role of a submissive person. He responds to all Joseph's commands. He is the one who puts the money in the sacks of Joseph's brothers. When they return, their fear is an impotent anxiety before the unpredictable menace of the powerful vizier (Gn 43:18), such that they make their protestations of innocence (Gn 43:19–22). This man takes away their fear and calms them with these words: "Calm yourselves ... the God of your father, who hid treasure for you in your packs" (Gn 43:23). The way in which he receives them into the realm of peace and security is in line with the expression "do not be afraid," which "means to take away the fear from those who are threatened and anxious" (Westermann 1996:77). The peace with which the steward receives them is reinforced. Through his words of welcome, the steward includes the brothers in the simple protection of four walls, and the possibility of relaxing, resting, washing themselves and being restored. Furthermore, the fact that the animals receive their feed belongs equally to this peace, and refers to the complication when Joseph was sent to check the well-being of his brothers and the flock (Gn 37:14). This action was followed by the offering of gifts. The nature of the gift is more significant in terms of its social meaning than its material reality. The presentation of the gift, as Westermann (1996:78) says, "can be a kind of blessing, and respect and blessing are very closely related". The main thing that can be noted with regard to Joseph's steward is his sense of responsibility in obeying the orders of his master.

### **5.2.2 Joseph**

In his relationship with his brothers, Joseph is an example of a man who can keep silent, as



described in Egyptian wisdom-lore. He is a prudent man, who conceals his knowledge (Pr 12:23) and restrains his lips (Pr 10:19). A patient man does not give way to his passions, and the narrator wants us to be amazed by the extraordinary control that Joseph is able to exercise over his emotions (Gn 42:24; 43:30–31; 45:1). It must not be forgotten that this prohibition of any display of emotion ran counter to the whole instinct of the ancient Hebrews. Israelite wisdom writers refer to a self-controlled man as *mosel beruho*, and a “tranquil mind” such as Joseph has, is a constructive force for good in the life of the community (Pr 14:30; 15:18; 24:29; 10:12).

With regard to Joseph, as vizier of Egypt, and the way in which he treats his brothers and then the test to which his brothers are submitted, there can be no doubt that Joseph disguises his face and dress by playing the role of a foreigner. He assumes the identity of an Egyptian, only speaking to them through an interpreter (Gn 42:23). In any event, Joseph does not do what seems to be obvious, but rather treats them as strangers. As governor, many foreigners were brought before him from different areas. He never thought about his family, knowing that the famine was severe all over the world, including Canaan. He was supposed to send a letter or give orders to his family to come and fetch grain, then also show them how he has nevertheless advanced in the world, but he does not do this because of his sense of responsibility. The first time he meets his brothers and recognises them, it would have been a good time to disclose his identity, embrace them and summon his father and Benjamin to Egypt. It was supposed to be a big ceremony, but it was not like that. Therefore, when he remembers his old dreams, he does not want to accuse his brothers of being spies (Gn 42:9). The confession of guilt in what Reuben says and what Joseph hears from them (Gn 42:21) are enough proof. However, he never thinks of this. As a vizier, he has a sense of responsibility, and needs to check, although he will know full well the truth of their story. However, they cannot know that the man whom they are addressing will hereby judge whether or not they are being honest. An important aspect of Joseph’s responsibility is that he restrains himself before them by speaking only an Egyptian dialect and using an interpreter. Who was his interpreter? It might have been Joseph’s oldest son, Manasseh and that Joseph spoke his mother tongue at home with his children, although they had been born in Egypt (Jacob 1974:287). He never speaks the Hebrew dialect with his brothers until the moment when he reveals himself to them. The researcher views this

attitude as being not only responsible but also strategic.

As already mentioned concerning aspects of his character, he is found to be like someone who weeps: “when he hears this (unbeknownst to them) he is overcome with remorse, and must leave the room to weep” (Mann 1988:70). Many critics ask what Joseph is really weeping about. It may be that he is reminded about what his brothers did to him. It reveals the complication action towards his brothers. In fact, his brothers’ words have passed part of the larger test that Joseph has in mind. He turns away and weeps, over the sorrow of his youth which they remind him of, their former hatred, their present repentance, their remorse, which he cannot yet believe, and certainly over his lonely father (Jacob 1974:287). However, Joseph immediately returns and gives the orders to his servants that will bring his brothers even greater dismay. When he demands that his brothers bring Benjamin, he knows, as a responsible person, what agony it will cause his father, and thus changes his decision: “I fear God”.

As previously mentioned with regard to the replacement of the money in the sacks of his brothers, this presented a real predicament for them. This does not mean that Joseph has forgotten about the money, but for him it is “a sign of his deeply veiled love which makes them so great a gift” (Von Rad 1972:384). Unfortunately, it was at the same time enigmatic and frightening for them. This gift not only affects his brothers, but also dismays Jacob so much that he cannot stand it (Gn 42:36–37). When Joseph sees them coming, he recognises Benjamin from afar, and orders his servant to bring them into the house. This is a special day for them. Joseph then asks about the father whose old age they have reported. His anxiety and secret hope is to be able to soon embrace him. One more time, they bow down (Gn 43:28), not intentionally to Joseph, but “to God who has preserved the father’s life, like our thank God” (Jacob 1974:294). The expression *wayyisha einav* which means “and he (Joseph) lifted (up) his eyes” (Gn 43:29) “often implies that the object seen is of special significance” (Wilson 2004:161; Wenham 1994:423). He sees Benjamin, the son of his mother and his full brother, he recognises him and is very happy when he claims: “May God be gracious to you, my son” (Gn 43:29). He blesses Benjamin and is so overcome by his brother(s) that he has to withdraw and weep (Gn 43:30). When Joseph is overpowered by his emotions, and must quickly leave the room so that the brothers do not notice, this emotion points more clearly than any words to that

which is the main issue (Westermann 1996:79). There are “powerful emotions welling up inside Joseph, but he knows that he has to control them in public, and release them in private, in order to continue the test” (Wilson 2004:161). Joseph’s “character is seen not in him being strong and emotionless, but in being able to show self-control in the face of strong emotions” (Wilson 2004:161). The food was served separately due to his rank. This is because an Egyptian may not eat with Hebrews. The description of the meal shows Joseph in his full splendour, as well as his honour, which he confers upon his brothers. The repetition of the word “shalom” (Gn 43:27–28) during their party is, according to Humphreys (1988:95, 114) “a foretaste of what is to come, and a backdrop or ideal by which to judge reality”.

During the shared meal in which they drink freely, “they are now lulled into trust” and it shows “a glimpse of what could be if relationships can be restored” (Wilson 2004:161). The separate seating arrangements (Gn 43:32) revealing a curiosity about Egyptian customs (Wilson 2004:161; Vergote 1959:188–189). “The seating of the brothers according to their ages is ominous, and might make them realise that the “man” knows more about them than they have told him” (Wilson 2004:161–162). Joseph is perhaps testing how the brothers will react when favouritism is shown towards Benjamin. The “cherished younger child is publicly given extra portions of food as a sign of special favour. The extra food operates as an equivalent sign to the coat given to Joseph in the initial situation (Gn 37:3), but this time there is no reaction by the brothers” (Wilson 2004:162). This party is already a fulfilment of the dreams (Gen 37 and 42:9), and becomes an animated event. After this party, the steward fills their sacks, and again returns their money to their sacks. He also places his silver divining cup in Benjamin’s sack and the brothers depart for Canaan, no doubt with a great sense of relief that their dangerous mission is over.

In essence, Joseph’s behaviour in testing his brothers “was justified by the need to bring about lasting reconciliation to a strife-torn family” (Wilson 2004:168). Joseph learns from this test that “his father believes him to be torn to pieces (Gn 44:28), and that Benjamin now has a special place in Jacob’s affection (Gn 44:30–31). He discovers that Judah has offered himself as security (Gn 44:32), and is prepared to honour that obligation in order to stay in his place (Gn 44:33). Joseph also learns about the danger to Jacob’s life if Benjamin does not return (Gn

44:29, 31, 34), and Judah's concern for his father's life (Gn 44:34). In this situation, "if Joseph rejects Judah's plea, the implication is that Joseph will be responsible for Jacob's demise" (Wilson 2004:170).

### **5.2.3 Joseph's brothers**

The brothers' reaction in general when the money is found in their sacks seems to be irresponsible (Gn 42:28). They try to accuse God of being responsible for their trap. They suspect that God wants to destroy them (Gn 43:18). On their first journey, "they came without any apparent sense of anxiety". Now, however, "they expect accusation over the returned money. They wonder how this unpredictable official would arbitrarily use his position of power" (Wilson 2004:159; Westermann 1986:124; Von Rad 1972:388). As would be expected, they are scared when they arrive, and are sent directly to Joseph's house (Gn. 43:18). Their minds are set at rest, however, when the steward assures them that the money has been paid, and then Simeon is released into their custody (Gn. 43:23). The expression *shalom laken* seems to be ironic when it is used by the steward. Is it Joseph who teaches these things to his steward, or is the expression habitually used in Egypt? Westermann (1996:77) views it as the "usual form of greeting for meeting people or receiving guests. It appears, however, to have a deep, more suggestive meaning here as well". If "shalom" is used when meeting people or receiving guests, what was happening in the initial situation (Gn 37:4) when Joseph's brothers saw him from far off and did not greet him peacefully, if this was a greeting form? Joseph's brothers are supposed to be those who know God as "the master of peace", and are supposed to do this anywhere. The way in which this word is used by Joseph's steward highlights an important issue regarding the character of Joseph's brothers. In this case, *shalom* shows kindness and extends "to them in provision (in a famine setting) of fodder for their donkeys, as well as water to wash their feet" (Wilson 2004:160), and even the money is given back to them and the charge of spying not mentioned again. They should keep this confession of guilt to themselves (Gn 42:21–22), and not tell their father.

Nevertheless, Joseph's brothers' responsibility is revealed when they go to trial. Judah uses the opportunity to act as a spokesperson for his brothers, by revealing point by point everything that happened during their first journey. The interesting words which capture one's attention

are those used in the pericope: “Please listen, my lord, and let your servant speak a word, I beg” (Gn 44:18). He never thinks about what will happen between him and the vizier. It is a responsible decision for him to make, with all the risks that it carries, and also shows his humility: “I beg”. Judah is determined to sacrifice himself and be a slave to the vizier, in order to save his youngest brother as he had promised. His attitude is trustworthy and responsible. In this study’s view, Judah’s words have passed part of the larger test that Joseph has in mind.

### **5.3 Responsibility of the brothers and their father**

#### **5.3.1 Jacob**

As previously mentioned, the three chapters (42–44) of Genesis reintroduce the patriarch Jacob, who has been absent from the scene since chapter 37, but this does not mean that he meets Joseph in chapters 42–45. “He hangs over the chapters by being as firmly based in Canaan as Joseph in Egypt” (Wilson 2004:142). His authority is evident in this section. He formulates a plan to buy grain, and the ten brothers are sent off on his command, because they were unable deal with the crisis in which they found themselves. In terms of responsibility, particularly in order for the family to survive, “Jacob must be willing to risk the life of Benjamin... He must give up the one whom he holds most dear” (Mann 1988:71). Wilson draws an excellent parallel with regard to his responsibility: “Jacob used his authority to send Joseph off to a distant place where, without Jacob’s knowledge, the ten brothers could exercise power over Joseph.” In chapter 42, it is said that “Jacob used his authority to send the ten off to a distant land where, again without Jacob’s knowledge, Joseph could exercise power over the ten” (Wilson 2004:143). This parallelism reveals the complication action linked with the denouement which involved Joseph and Benjamin: Jacob now pays attention to what has happened. He does not send Benjamin, the teenager, as he did with Joseph (Gn. 37:12). He is afraid that harm may now befall Benjamin (Gn 42:4), and it is responsible of him to be apprehensive in light of the loss of Joseph, and by remembering the past, he will be able to construct the future. If Jacob refuses to allow Benjamin to go down with his brothers, what will happen to Joseph’s plan? However, Jacob’s reaction is normal, at least as a father, and this is responsible. In the chapter that follows, because the famine is not over, he once again orders his sons to go to Egypt to fetch grain.

After agreeing to let Benjamin go with his brothers, he gives a prayer of blessing, committing them to El Shaddai, who will supervise their travels (Gn 43:14). Therefore, the end of his prayer is difficult to assess. In its setting, says Wilson, “it does not appear to be a trusting submission to the will of God, but more wallowing in self-pity” (Wilson 2004:159). In terms of this study, the relevance of this responsibility is in the way he renounces his first decision: *im ken epho zot ashou*, which literally means “if it must be so, then do this” (Gn. 43:11), although such a consequence would be unbearable for him. He seals his decision by sending his sons with a gift to the “man”. The nature of the “gift is more significant in terms of its social meaning than its material reality” (Westermann 1996:78).

### **5.3.2 Joseph’s brothers**

The responsibility of Joseph’s brothers is linked to three areas: firstly, the responsibility which makes them go and fetch grain in Egypt, with all its consequences; secondly, the problems they encounter during their two journeys with Simeon as a hostage; and thirdly, Judah’s responsibility in becoming a spokesman for his brothers during their trial. The brothers agree to respond to their father’s request to go and fetch grain. After fetching grain, they return without their brother Simeon. They are supposed to provide a reason why their brother is being kept hostage. This was surely not an easy task. They already knew that since the time when Joseph went missing, their father has been in terrible agony. Therefore, they need to decide on a strategy to convince their father. Jacob, on hearing about their brother Simeon is deeply hurt when he claims: “You have robbed me of my children. Joseph is lost; Simeon is lost; and now you would take Benjamin. Everything is against me” (Gn 42:36).

Reuben tries to convince his father by sacrificing, in turn, his two children (Gn 42:37). As the eldest son, he feels responsible for Benjamin as he did for Joseph, and he deeply sympathises with his father (Gn 37:22). Reuben’s responsibility links with that in the complication action. His suggestion, however, does not seem to be acceptable. How can he return with Benjamin? “Does he have the power to bring him back when they are in Egypt? Jacob, in his sorrow, no longer shrinks from the word “dead”, shaking his head” (Jacob 1974:289). In truth the researcher is sure that he did not eat the grain that they brought with an appetite, as he was very bitter.

Thereafter, they come to an understanding and try to live in harmony, as if nothing has happened. However, remorse sets in when the grain is finished and they have to go again to fetch grain in Egypt. Jacob orders his sons to go down to Egypt, but the reaction of his sons comes like a “snowball” to his head (Gn 43:6). It seems as if Judah feels his father’s sorrow more than the others and he can no longer cope with it. Responsibility is again linked to Judah when he remains silent and advises his brothers to leave their father alone, as hunger will later cause him to yield (Gn 42:38). His principal responsibility is clearly shown with the vizier of Egypt, when he releases them, saying “we must not go into his presence unless our brother was with us” (Gn 43:3–5). As Wilson (2004:157) argues, he gives “his father the hard facts, reminding Jacob that they were sternly warned not to return without their younger brother. Judah also treats his father with due respect (Gn 43:4–5)” (Wilson 2004:157), he defers to Jacob, saying that he will only take Benjamin to Egypt if his father sends him. “Judah firmly states this as the condition for another trip to Egypt (since without Benjamin, it is both pointless and suicidal)” (Wilson 2004:157). “Judah offers himself as a pledge (or security) for Benjamin’s safety” (Mann 1988:71). Therefore, Judah takes responsibility not by sacrificing his children, but rather sacrificing his own life: “Send the boy with me. I shall go surety for him, and you may hold me responsible. If I do not bring him back and restore him to you, you can blame me for it all my life” (Gn 43:8–9). He then leaves the decision to Jacob, as Wilson (2004:157–158) suggests: “He reasserts the central issue of the need to go in order to obtain grain as he sees that the present crisis is a matter of life and death. His offer to be a surety responsible for Benjamin is more balanced and sensible than the rash words of Reuben in Genesis 42:37.” Some commentators find that Judah’s initiative is responsible, because he thinks about the consequences if they do not bring their brother back with them. Jacob (1974:290) argues that “he speaks the decisive word after a futile suggestion from Reuben, saying that the man (vizier) made a formal demand, taking an oath”, as it says in Genesis 42:15.

Judah is clearer about his intervention. In the last intervention (Gn 37:26–27), the commentator, by arguing in the same way, finds that Reuben’s words have impressed Judah, and his appeal is not to emotion but to reason (Jacob 1974:254). Judah plays an important role with regard to his brothers. He never makes a decision, but he does try to remind his brothers about the selling of

Joseph. However, his appropriate decision seems considered and accepted as it was in the complication action. It can be added that this was a credible man's word. Judah's words have got through to his father's feelings (Gn 43:11–13). Judah understands his father's words, and Jacob's willingness to release Benjamin thus represents a turning point in this section (Mann 1988:71). It shows the responsibility of Joseph's brothers towards their father, even if it does not involve all the brothers. In order to not cause his father to think too much, Judah "pledges himself, not as usually said to carry his point, but out of tender love for the father who shall have no moment of anxiety during their absence as far as he is capable for it" (Jacob 1974:292).

This situation is very significant. Firstly, Jacob will be alone in Canaan, as all his sons have gone to Egypt. It is normal for Jacob to think about his death (Gn 43:14b). This shows his most difficult moment. It is also a cry of despair. However, there is a "contrast between this emotional speech and the calm tone of the following narration" (Jacob 1974:292; Mann 1988:71). At a time like this, when Jacob is deeply hurt, strategy, knowledge and wisdom are needed in order to convince him. In any event, responsibility should go together with wisdom. Without wisdom, one cannot be truly responsible. Solomon, in order to guide people, asks God for wisdom, because he knows that this guidance needs wisdom.

## **6 Summary**

This section, which is called the denouement, cannot be developed without linking it to the complication. The situation which involves Jacob, Joseph and his brothers in the complication is balanced and becomes a turning point of the narrative. It is very interesting to note that this section reveals, or is the centre of, the entire narrative. Wilson (2004:140), referring to Fretheim (1994:627) and Humphreys (1988:41), finds this interesting and suggests that "the two journeys of chapters 42–44 mirror the doubled dreams of the previous chapters... with doubled dreams being followed either by a complication (chapter 37) or resolution (chapter 40 and 41). And the doubled journeys are resolved by the family reconciliation in chapter 45".

The main elements that separated Joseph from his brothers for over twenty-five years are jealousy, guilt and despair. "Their characters are [in fact] not aware of what has happened, anxious as they are over the outcome of their decision" (Mann 1988:72). This section focuses



on the relationship between the brothers, when it is announced by the steward that they will dine with Joseph in his house, expressed in the way that the steward abruptly dismisses the issue of the money in their sacks (Gn 43:32–34). In this regard, it does not matter how the dinner will be shared and eaten by Egyptians, Hebrews and Joseph. Therefore, he is Zaphenathpaneah, not an Egyptian – he is Joseph, but no longer identified as a Hebrew as in the past (Gn 39:14, 17; 41:12). His family does not recognise him and in fact assumes that he is dead, and at this point, he has not yet revealed himself to them. However, the “seating of Joseph’s brothers represents a conflict within the family that has disrupted their lives” (Mann 1988:72). They are seated in strict order of succession, but when the meal is served, Benjamin receives five times as much as his brothers. The banquet thus reflects a critical stage both in terms of Joseph’s identity and that of his brothers. They wine and dine merrily in Joseph’s house, but on the way home, will they throw Benjamin into the pit? However, the reference to Benjamin being given 300 pieces of silver and five garments might suggest that the favouritism has resurfaced (Gn 37:3).

While there is undeniably special consideration given here to Benjamin, it is not clear, in the absence of a comment by the narrator, whether or not this is to be viewed negatively (Wilson 2004:181). There are several factors that have negative connotations with regard to Joseph’s attitude towards Benjamin because of the gifts: firstly, the special robe made by Jacob for Joseph led to his brothers hating him (Gn 37:3–4). There appears here to be a singling out of Benjamin for Joseph’s special affection (Gn 45:14–15). However, the important thing is that “the special consideration given here to Benjamin does not imply a rejection of the others” (Wilson 2004:181). There is a sense that it “was appropriate to recompense Benjamin more than the other ten (brothers)” (Wilson 2004:181). “They were being tested by Joseph (Gn 42–44) because of their past transgressions. Benjamin, on the other hand, had to be included in the accusation, despite his precious innocence. Perhaps this extra gift was intended to compensate him in some way” (Wilson 2004:181). The extra garments given after the reconciliation seem to imply that they were not intended to provoke jealousy in the brothers. However, the text does not clarify the reason for this disparity, but instead moves on (Wilson 2004:181).

However, Joseph’s attitude towards his brothers remains one of acceptance, not condemnation

(Gn 45:1–4). “Although he refers to their selling of him, this fades, as argues one scholar, into the background when Joseph foregrounds the active working of God in order to achieve his purposes” (Wilson 2004:178). The message (Gn 45:5) is that the brothers should stop being distressed or angry at themselves (Wilson, 2004:178). Therefore, there is nothing in the text which implies that a full reconciliation between Joseph and his brothers has taken place. However, the text stipulates that after this “his brothers talked with him” (Gn 45:15). It could be that the real reconciliation, with forgiveness, will appear more clearly after the death of their father, Jacob (Gen 50:15–21).

With regard to responsibility, Judah seems to be particularly responsible in this section. He appears to be a different Judah from the one who suggested selling Joseph to the Ishmaelite in the complication, and who was afraid to allow his third son to continue the family seed (Gn 38). But with the denouement, he becomes the spokesman for his brothers and the one who is trusted by his father. Nevertheless, Joseph does not view this situation as being bad, when he replies to his brothers: “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good”. It could never have happened if it had not been God’s plan. This also means that it is the providence of God and his will to decide everything for our own good. “The problem of a relationship between human intentions and the divine control of events is still more keenly felt” (Von Rad 2005:78). This suggests that God has all the threads firmly in his hands, even when men are least aware of it. However, this is a bare statement of fact, and the way in which God’s will is related to human purposes remains a mystery. There is the statement that Yahweh controls all things, and also a sharply drawn contrast between human plans and the divine direction of affairs (Pr 16:9). The similarity of thought is most striking, and this is not fortuitous, as shown by the aphorism: “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is Yahweh’s purpose that will be established” (Pr 19: 21). Just as in Joseph’s dictum, the purposes of God and man are set against each other, and the purposes of God prevail. Hence, divine economy and human intentions are central issues in the theology of wisdom-writing. Thus, “that which men purpose is one thing; what God does is another” (Von Rad 2005:79). It cannot be denied that “in the Joseph narrative a deep cleft threatens to arise between divine and human purposes, and human activity is so heavily fettered by the all-embracing divine control of events that it comes dangerously close to losing all significance whatsoever” (von Rad 2005:79).

In terms of the position of Jacob and his sons with regard to Joseph, three important things need to be emphasised. Firstly, the attitude of Jacob's sons, who lie to him by telling him that Joseph has been killed and devoured by wild animals (Gn 37). Secondly, the same sons, after going to Egypt because of the famine, and seeing Joseph for the first and second time, are reminded by Reuben, after their interview with Joseph, of their family and the difficult situation they are faced with because of Joseph's test for his brothers. All these points which link with the complication are in fact insufficient for them to tell the truth to their father. Scholars, however, are quiet in this regard. Thirdly, after keeping Simeon in Joseph's court as a slave, and after revealing himself (Joseph) to them as his brother, the emotions are really strong, but how does Jacob react to hearing that his son is alive? One sees here that Jacob is really troubled, but also happy to hear this news and to see the proof, when he claims that "it is enough". He forgets to ask his sons what has happened between the time that Joseph was supposedly devoured and him becoming prime minister in Egypt: "when the vase is full, not time for investigation". However, this study is balanced with the complication and seem be a good parallel with the Joseph narrative. The next study will focus on the final situation and the narrator will bring together the different stands that he has woven.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **THE FINAL SITUATION (Gn 45:16–50:25)**

#### **1 Introduction**

As was mentioned in the previous chapter, this section will deal with Jacob settling in Goshen, starting with Joseph ordering his brothers to bring back his father from the land of Canaan to Egypt so that they could settle in Goshen with Pharaoh's permission (Gn 45:16–20), the preparations to bring back his father, and the reality of Jacob living in Egypt (Gn 45:25–28). This section, called the final situation, will be dealt with together with the initial situation as an example of parallelism in the narrative. As with the other chapters, this chapter starts with the pericope, which helps the reader to refer to the text, and then examines the scene, which is divided into two parts: the macro scene, which reveals the main issues related to the scene, and the micro scene, which focuses on other parts of the scene. The characters and acts will then be analysed, and this will lead to the issue of responsibility, which is the main focus point.

This section starts with Joseph going to visit his father Jacob in Goshen. Before this, Joseph's arrival is reported to Jacob. Intense emotion is shown when Jacob meets Joseph, his son, who was thought to be dead but is still alive. Pharaoh's blessing on Jacob leads to peace, and Jacob's family settles in Goshen, as it was ordered. Then, Joseph focuses on his daily duties. A few years later, a message is sent to Joseph about his father's health. Joseph brings his two sons with him to see his father. Israel is delighted to see his grandchildren at this time, as patriarch of the people, even though he is ill. The end of this section deals with Israel's blessing (to the two sons of Joseph and all the sons of Jacob), and then Israel's last days in Goshen, followed later by Joseph's death. This study's task, as mentioned above, is to focus on the characters and acts (deeds) of Joseph, his father and his brothers, as revealed in this section. The summary will present the findings of this chapter.

#### **2 Pericope**

45 <sup>16</sup> When the report reached the royal palace that Joseph's brothers had come, Pharaoh and his officials were pleased. <sup>17</sup> Pharaoh told to Joseph to say to his brothers: 'This is what you must do. Load your beasts and go

straight back to Canaan. <sup>18</sup> Fetch your father and your households and come to me. I shall give you the best region there is in Egypt, and you will enjoy the fat of the land.' <sup>19</sup> He was also to tell them: 'Take wagons from Egypt for your dependants and your wives and fetch your father back here. <sup>20</sup> Have no regrets at leaving your possessions, for all the best there is in the whole of Egypt is yours.'

<sup>21</sup> Israel's sons followed these instructions, and Joseph supplied them with wagons, as Pharaoh's had ordered, and provisions for the journey. <sup>22</sup> To each of them he gave new clothes, but to Benjamin he gave three hundred pieces of silver and five sets of clothes. <sup>23</sup> Moreover he sent his father ten donkeys carrying the finest products of Egypt, and ten she-donkeys laden with grain, bread and other provisions for the journey. <sup>24</sup> He sent his brothers on their way, warning them not to quarrel among themselves on the road. <sup>25</sup> They set off, and went up from Egypt to their father Jacob in Canaan. <sup>26</sup> When they told him that Joseph was still alive and was ruler of the whole of Egypt, he was stunned at the news and did not believe them. <sup>27</sup> However when they reported to him all that Joseph had said to them, and when he saw the wagons which Joseph had provided to fetch him, his spirit revived. <sup>28</sup> Israel said, 'It is enough! Joseph my son is still alive; I shall go and see him before I die.'

**46** <sup>1</sup> Israel set out with all he had and came to Beersheba, where he offered sacrifices to the God of his father Isaac. <sup>2</sup> God called to Israel in a vision by night, 'Jacob! Jacob!' and he answered, 'I am here.' <sup>3</sup> God said, 'I am God, the God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt, for there I shall make you a great nation. <sup>4</sup> I shall go down to Egypt with you, and I myself will bring you back again without fail; and Joseph's will be the hands that close your eyes.' <sup>5</sup> So Jacob set out from Beersheba. Israel's sons conveyed their father Jacob along with their wives and children in the wagons which Pharaoh had sent to bring him. <sup>6</sup> They took their heirs and the goods they had acquired in Canaan and came to Egypt, Jacob and all his family with him; <sup>7</sup> his sons and their sons, his daughters and his sons' daughters, he brought them all to Egypt.

<sup>8</sup> These are the names of the Israelites, Jacob and his sons, who entered Egypt: Reuben, Jacob's eldest son, <sup>9</sup> and the sons of Reuben: Enoch, Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. <sup>10</sup> The sons of Simeon: Jemuel, Jamin, Ohad, Jachim, Zohar and Saul, who was the son of a Canaanite woman. <sup>11</sup> The sons of Levi: Gershon, Kohath, and Merari. <sup>12</sup> The sons of Judah: Er, Onan, Shelah, Perez, and Zerah; of these Er and Onan died in Canaan. The sons of Perez were Hezron and Hamul. <sup>13</sup> The sons of Issachar: Tola, Pua, Iob, and Shimron. <sup>14</sup> The sons of Zebulun: Sered, Elon, and Jahleel. <sup>15</sup> These are the sons of Leah whom she bore to Jacob in Paddam-Aram, and there was also his daughter Dinah. His sons and daughters numbered thirty-three in all.

<sup>16</sup> The sons of Gad: Ziphion, Haggi, Shuni, Ezbon, Eri, Arodi, and Areli. <sup>17</sup> The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi, Beriah, and their sister Serah. The sons of Beriah: Heber and Malchiel. <sup>18</sup> These are the descendants of Zilpah whom Laban gave to his daughter Leah, sixteen in all, born to Jacob.

<sup>19</sup> The sons of Jacob's wife Rachel: Joseph and Benjamin. <sup>20</sup> Manasseh and Ephraim were born to Joseph in Egypt; Asenath daughter of Potiphera priest of On bore them to him. <sup>21</sup> The sons of Benjamin: Bela, Becher, and Ashbel; and the sons of Bela: Gera, Naaman, Ehi, Rosh, Muppim, Huppim, and Ard. <sup>22</sup> These are descendants of Rachel fourteen in all, born to Jacob.

<sup>23</sup> The son of Dan: Hushim. <sup>24</sup> The sons of Naphtali: Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem. <sup>25</sup> These are the descendants of Bilhah whom Laban had given to his daughter Rachel, seven in all, born to Jacob.

<sup>26</sup> All the persons who came to Egypt with Jacob, his direct descendants, not including the wives of his sons, were sixty-six in all. <sup>27</sup> Two sons were born to Joseph in Egypt. Thus the whole house of Jacob numbered seventy when it entered in Egypt.

<sup>28</sup> Jacob sent Judah ahead to Joseph to advise him that he was on his way to Goshen. They entered Goshen, <sup>29</sup> and Joseph had his chariot yoked to go up there to meet Israel his father. When they met, Joseph threw his arms round him and wept on his shoulder for a long time. <sup>30</sup> Israel said to Joseph, 'I have seen for myself that you are still alive. Now I am ready to die.' <sup>31</sup> Joseph said to his brothers and to his father's household, 'I shall go up and inform Pharaoh; I shall tell him, "My brothers and my father's household who were in Canaan have come to me. <sup>32</sup> The men are shepherds with their own flocks and herds, and they have brought with them these flocks and herds and everything they possess." <sup>33</sup> So when Pharaoh summons you and asks what your occupation is, <sup>34</sup> you must answer, "My lord, we have herded flocks all our lives, as our fathers did before us." You must say this if you are to settle in Goshen, because shepherds are regarded as unclean by Egyptians.'

**47** <sup>1</sup> Joseph came and reported to Pharaoh, 'My father and my brothers have arrived from Canaan, with their flocks and herds and everything they possess, and they are now in Goshen.' <sup>2</sup> He had chosen five of his brothers, and he brought them into Pharaoh's presence. <sup>3</sup> When he asked them what their occupation was, they answered, 'We are shepherds like our fathers before us, <sup>4</sup> and we have come to stay in this country, because owing to the severe famine in Canaan there is no pasture there for our flocks. We ask your Majesty's leave to settle now in Goshen.' <sup>5</sup> Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'As to your father and your brothers who have come to you, <sup>6</sup> the land of Egypt is at your disposal; settle them in the best part of it. Let them live in Goshen, and if you know of any among them with the skill, make them chief herdsmen in charge of my cattle.'

<sup>7</sup> Then Joseph brought his father in and presented him to Pharaoh. Jacob blessed Pharaoh, <sup>8</sup> who asked him his age, <sup>9</sup> and he answered, 'The years of my life on earth are one hundred and thirty; few and hard have they been—fewer than the years my fathers lived.' <sup>10</sup> Jacob then blessed Pharaoh and withdrew from his presence. <sup>11</sup> As Pharaoh had ordered, Joseph settled his father and his brothers, and allotted land to them in Egypt, in the best part of the country, the district of Rameses. <sup>12</sup> He supported his father, his brothers, and his father's whole household with the food they needed.

<sup>13</sup> There was no food anywhere, so very severe was the famine; Egypt and Canaan were laid low by it. <sup>14</sup> Joseph gathered in all the money in Egypt and Canaan in charge for the grain which the people bought, and put it in Pharaoh's treasury. <sup>15</sup> When the money in Egypt and Canaan had come to an end, the Egyptians all came to Joseph. 'Give us food,' they said, 'or we shall perish before your very eyes. Our money is all gone,' <sup>16</sup> Joseph replied, 'If your money is all gone, hand over your livestock and I shall give you food in return.' <sup>17</sup> So they brought their livestock to Joseph, who gave them food in exchange for their horses, their flocks of sheep, their herds of cattle, and their donkeys. He supported them that year with food in exchange for all their herds. <sup>18</sup> The year came to an end, and in the following year they came to him and said, 'My lord, we cannot conceal from you that with our money finished and our herds of cattle made over to you, there is nothing left for your lordship but our bodies and our lands. <sup>19</sup> Why should we perish before your eyes, we and our land as well? Take us and our land in payment for food, and we and our land alike will be in bondage to Pharaoh. Give us seed-corn to keep us alive, or we shall die

and our land will become desert.'

<sup>20</sup> So Joseph acquired for Pharaoh all the land in Egypt: because the Egyptians, hard-pressed by the famine, sold all their fields and the land became Pharaoh's. <sup>21</sup> Joseph moved the people into the towns throughout the whole territory of Egypt. <sup>22</sup> Only the land which belonged to the priests Joseph did not buy; they had a fixed allowance from Pharaoh and lived on this, so that they did not have to sell their land.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph said to the people, 'Listen; I have now bought you and your land for Pharaoh. Here is seed-corn for you. Sow the land, <sup>24</sup> but at harvest give one fifth of the crop to Pharaoh. Four fifths shall be yours to provide seed for your fields and food for yourselves, your households, and your dependants.' <sup>25</sup> 'You have saved our lives,' the people said. 'If it pleases your lordship, you shall be Pharaoh's slaves.' <sup>26</sup> Joseph established it as a law in Egypt that one fifth of the produce should belong to Pharaoh, and so it has been from that day to this. It was only the priests' land that did not pass into Pharaoh's lands.

<sup>27</sup> Thus Israel settled in Egypt, in Goshen, where they acquired land, and were fruitful, and increased greatly. <sup>28</sup> Jacob lived in Egypt for seventeen years and died at the age of a hundred and forty-seven. <sup>29</sup> When the hour of his death drew near, he summoned his son Joseph and said to him, 'I have a favour to ask: give me your solemn oath that you will deal loyally and faithfully with me; do not bury me in Egypt. <sup>30</sup> So that I may lie with my forefathers, you are to take me up from Egypt and bury me in their grave.' He answered, 'I shall do as you say.' <sup>31</sup> 'Swear that you will,' said Jacob. So he gave him his oath, and Israel bowed in worship by the head of his bed.

**48** Sometime later Joseph was informed that his father was ill, so he took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, with him and came to Jacob. <sup>2</sup> When Jacob heard that his son Joseph had come to him, he gathered his strength and sat up in bed. <sup>3</sup> Jacob said to Joseph, God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in Canaan and blessed me; <sup>4</sup> he said to me, "I shall make you fruitful and increase your descendants until they become a host of nations. I shall give this land to them after you as a possession for all time." <sup>5</sup> Now,' Jacob went on, 'your two sons, who were born in Egypt before I came to join you here, will be counted as my sons; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine as Reuben and Simeon are. <sup>6</sup> But the children born to you after them will be counted as yours; in respect of their tribal territory they will be reckoned under their elder brother's names. <sup>7</sup> In Canaan on my return from Paddam-Aram and while we were still some distance from Ephrath, your mother Rachel died on the way, and I buried her there by the road to Ephrath (that is Bethlehem).

<sup>8</sup> When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, 'Who are these?' <sup>9</sup> "They are my sons, replied Joseph, 'whom God has given me here.' Israel said, "Then bring them to me, that I may blessed them.' <sup>10</sup> Now Israel eyes were dim with age, and he could hardly see. Joseph brought the boys close to his father, and he kissed them and embraced them. <sup>11</sup> He said to Joseph, 'I had not expected to see your face again, and now God has let me see your sons as well.' <sup>12</sup> Joseph removed them from his father's knees and bowed to the ground. <sup>13</sup> Then he took the two of them and brought them close to Israel: Ephraim on the right, that is Israel's left; and Manasseh on the left, that is Israel's right. <sup>14</sup> But Israel, crossing his hands, stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, although he was the younger, and laid his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though he was the firstborn. <sup>15</sup> He blessed Joseph and said:

'The God in whose presence my forefathers lived, my forefathers Abraham and Isaac, the God who has been my

shepherd all my life to this day, <sup>16</sup> the angel who rescued me from all misfortune, may he blessed these boys; they will be called by my name, and by the names of my forefathers, Abraham and Isaac; may they grow into a great people on earth.'

<sup>17</sup> When Joseph saw his father laying his right hand on Ephraim's head, he was displeased and took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's. <sup>18</sup> He said, 'That is not right, father. This is the firstborn; lay your right hand on his head.' <sup>19</sup> But his father refused; he said, 'I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Yet his younger will be greater than he, and his descendants will be a whole nation in themselves.' <sup>20</sup> So he blessed them that day and said:

'When a blessing is pronounced in Israel, men shall use your names and said, "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh."

So he set Ephraim before Manasseh. <sup>21</sup> Then Israel said to Joseph, 'I am about to die, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers, <sup>22</sup> where I assign you one ridge of land more than your brothers; I took it from the Amorites with sword and bow.'

**49** JACOB summoned his sons. 'Come near,' he said, 'and I shall tell you what is to happen to you in days to come.

<sup>2</sup> 'Gathered round me and listen, you sons of Jacob; listen to Israel your father.

<sup>3</sup> 'Reuben, you are my firstborn, my strength and the first fruit of my vigour, excelling in pride, excelling in might.

<sup>4</sup> Uncontrollable as a flood, you will excel no more, because you climbed into your father's bed, and defiled his concubine's couch.

<sup>5</sup> Simeon and Levi are brothers, weapons of violence are their counsels.

<sup>6</sup> My soul would not enter their council, my heart will not join their assembly; for in anger they killed men, wantonly they hamstrung oxen.

<sup>7</sup> A curse be on their anger, for it was fierce; a curse of their wrath, for it was ruthless! I shall scatter them in Jacob, I shall disperse them in Israel.

<sup>8</sup> Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's sons will bow to you in homage.

<sup>9</sup> Judah, a lion's whelp,

You have returned from the kill, my son;

You crouch and stretch like a lion no one dare rouse.

<sup>10</sup> The sceptre will not pass from Judah,

Nor the staff from between his feet,

Until he receives what is his due and the obedience of the nations is his.

<sup>11</sup> He tethers his donkey to the vine,

And its colt to the red vine;

He washes his cloak in wine,

His robe in the blood of grapes.

<sup>12</sup> Darker than wine are his eyes,



whiter than milk his teeth

<sup>13</sup> ‘Zebulun lives by the seashore; his coast is a haven for ships, and his frontier touches Sidon.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Issachar, a gelded donkey lying down in the cattle pens,

<sup>15</sup> saw that a settled home was good and that the land was pleasant, so he bent his back to the burden and submitted to forced labour.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Dan - his people will be strong as any tribe in Israel!

<sup>17</sup> Let Dan be a viper on the road, a horned snake on the path,  
that bites the horse’s fetlock so that the rider is thrown off backwards.

<sup>18</sup> ‘I wait in hope for salvation from you, LORD.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Gad is raided by raiders, and he will raid them from the rear.

<sup>20</sup> ‘Asher will feast everyday, and provide dishes fit for a king.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Naphtali is a spreading terebinth putting forth lovely boughs.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Joseph is fruitful tree by a spring, whose branches climb over the wall.

<sup>23</sup> The archers savagely attacked him, shooting and assailing him fiercely,

<sup>24</sup> but Joseph’s bow remained unfailing and his arms were tireless by the power of the Strong One of Jacob, by the name of the Shepherd of Israel,

<sup>25</sup> by the God of your father – so may he help you!

By God Almighty – so may he bless you with the blessings of heaven above, and the blessings of the deep that lies below!

The blessings of breast and womb

<sup>26</sup> and the blessings of your father are stronger

than the blessings of the eternal mountains and the bounty of the everlasting hills.

May they rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of him who was prince among his brothers.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Benjamin is a ravaging wolf: in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he snatches a share of the spoil.’

<sup>28</sup> These are the tribes of Israel, twelve in all, and this was what their father said to them, when he blessed them each in turn. <sup>29</sup> Then he gave them his last charge and said, ‘I am about to be gathered to my ancestors; bury me with my forefathers in the cave on the plot of land which belonged to Ephron the Hittite, <sup>30</sup> that is the cave on the plot of land at Machpelah east of Mamre in Canaan, the field which Abraham bought from Ephron the Hittite for a burial-place. <sup>31</sup> There Abraham was buried with his wife Sara; there Isaac and his wife Rebecca were buried; and that is where I buried Leah. <sup>32</sup> The land and the cave there were bought from the Hittites. <sup>33</sup> When Jacob had finished giving these instructions to his sons, he drew up his feet on to the bed, breathed his last, and was gathered to his ancestors.

**50** Then Joseph threw himself upon his father, weeping over him and kissing him. <sup>2</sup> He gave orders to the physicians in his service to embalm his father, and they did so, <sup>3</sup> finishing the task in forty days, the usual time required for embalming. <sup>4</sup> The Egyptians mourned Israel for seventy days. <sup>5</sup> When the period of mourning was over, Joseph spoke to members of Pharaoh’s household: ‘May I ask a favour – please speak for me to Pharaoh.

Tell him that, my father on his deathbed made me swear that I would bury him in the grave that he had bought for himself in Canaan. Ask Pharaoh to let me go up and bury my father; and afterwards I shall return.’<sup>6</sup> Pharaoh’s reply was: ‘Go and bury your father in accordance with your oath.’<sup>7</sup> So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went all Pharaoh’s officials, the elders of his household, and all the elders of Egypt,<sup>8</sup> as well as all Joseph’s own household; only their children, with the flocks and herds, were left in Goshen.<sup>9</sup> Chariots as well as horsemen went up with him, a very great company.

<sup>10</sup> When they came to the threshing – floor of Atad beside the river Jordan, they raised a loud and bitter lamentation; and Joseph observed seven days’ mourning for his father.<sup>11</sup> When the Canaanites who lived there saw this mourning at the threshing – floor of Atad, they said, ‘How bitterly the Egyptians are mourning!’ So they named the place beside Jordan Abel – mizraim.

<sup>12</sup> Thus Jacob’s sons did to him as he had instructed them:<sup>13</sup> they took him to Canaan and buried him in the cave on the plot of land at Machpelah, the land which Abraham had bought as a burial – place from Ephron the Hittite, to the east of Mamre.<sup>14</sup> After burying his father, Joseph returned to Egypt with his brothers and all who had gone up with him for the burial.

<sup>15</sup> Now their father was dead, Joseph’s brothers were afraid, for they said, ‘What if Joseph should bear a grudge against us and pay us back for all the harm we did to him?’<sup>16</sup> They therefore sent a messenger to Joseph to say, ‘In his last words to us before he died, your father gave us this message: <sup>17</sup> “Say this to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers crime and wickedness; I know they did you harm.” So now we beg you: forgive our crime, for we are servants of your father’s God.’ Joseph was moved to tears by their words.<sup>18</sup> His brothers approached and bowed to the ground before him. ‘We are your slaves,’ they said.<sup>19</sup> But Joseph replied, ‘Do not be afraid. Am I in the place of God?’<sup>20</sup> You meant to do me harm; but God meant to bring good out of it by preserving the lives of many people, as we see today.<sup>21</sup> Do not be afraid. I shall provide for you and your dependants.’ Thus he comforted them and set their minds at rest.

<sup>22</sup> Joseph remained in Egypt, he and his father’s household. He lived to be a hundred and ten years old,<sup>23</sup> and saw Ephraim’s children to the third generation; he also recognized as his the children of Manasseh’s son Machir.<sup>24</sup> He said to his brothers, ‘I am about to die; but God will not fail to come to your aid and take you from here to the land which he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’<sup>25</sup> He made the sons of Israel solemnly swear that when God came to their aid, they would carry his bones up with them from there.<sup>26</sup> So Joseph died in Egypt at the age of a hundred and ten, and he was embalmed and laid in a coffin.

### **3 The scenes**

#### **3.1 Macro scene**

The scene focused on the final situation links up with the initial situation that began with Pharaoh’s agreement (Gn 45:16–20) and Joseph’s preparation for bringing his father from the land of Canaan to Egypt, as suggested by Pharaoh (Gn 45:21–24). It then proceeds to Jacob living in Egypt (Gn 45:25–28). Jacob consults God in Beersheba and offers Him sacrifices.

From there, God reveals himself and convinces Jacob to go down to Egypt, according to His promise (Gn 46:1–5). This section deals with Jacob settling in Goshen. Before this happens, Judah is sent by Jacob to Joseph, informing the latter of his arrival in Goshen, followed by the mood of the “rendezvous” and the great emotion that is displayed when Israel meets Joseph, his son, who was believed dead but is still alive. Pharaoh’s unexpected blessing appears like a “snowball” in order to give shape to the ceremony. The scene also focuses on Joseph’s daily duties, and then deals with Joseph’s father’s ill health, as well as his blessing upon his grandchildren and all his sons. Finally, the scene ends with Israel’s last days in Goshen and his mourning in Canaan, followed later by Joseph’s own death.

### **3.2 Micro scene**

Scene 1: Jacob moves to Egypt (Gn 45:1–46:7)

Scene 2: Jacob’s family in Egypt (Gn 46:8–28)

Scene 3: Jacob met Joseph personally (Gn 46:29–34)

Scene 4: Jacob’s family settles in Goshen (Gn 47:1–19)

Scene 5: Situation of famine (Gn 47:20–31)

Scene 6: Israel’s last days (Gn 48:1–22)

Scene 7: Israel blesses his sons (Gn 49:1–32)

Scene 8: The death of Israel (Gn 50:1–21)

Scene 9: The death of Joseph (Gn 50:22–26)

The micro scene therefore helps us to deal with the final situation by referring back to the initial scene, which focused on the characters and the actions, that is, the main responsibility.

## **4 The characters**

This section looks at Joseph’s relationship with Pharaoh, particularly in terms of their agreement to fetch Joseph’s father in Canaan; the relationship between Jacob and his sons before they settle in Egypt, as shown in their report to their father; and Joseph’s relationship with his father from the time of the preparations until Jacob settles in Goshen. In addition, Joseph’s relationship with his brothers, who are faced with his (Joseph’s) reality, and the guilt

that they feel about what they did to him in the past, will be examined. Finally, the relationship between Jacob and Pharaoh, from his blessing on Pharaoh until Jacob's last days, will be discussed. The researcher's task will be to reveal all those characters that affect each other either positively or negatively and attempt to show the consequences in terms of responsibility or irresponsibility, which is the main focus of this study.

#### **4.1 Relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh**

This section focuses on the relationship between Joseph and Pharaoh, as previously mentioned, with regard to their agreement to fetch Jacob from Canaan. This reinforces Joseph's claims and shows the cordial relationship between Joseph, Pharaoh and all Pharaoh's courtiers.

##### **4.1.1 Joseph**

Since Joseph was elevated to the position of vizier, it is evident that his behaviour and deeds were always pleasing to Pharaoh. Joseph was, in his view, a straightforward man whom he trusted. Joseph did everything without complaint. Joseph's claims, related in Genesis 45: 8–11, 13, are realised at the right time. His humility has matured him, and all his requests are agreed to by Pharaoh. Joseph, as a vizier, does not keep his family situation to himself, and he does not act on his own. The cordial collaboration between Joseph and Pharaoh is evidence of righteousness and honesty, combined with humility and respect for each other.

##### **4.1.2 Pharaoh**

After Joseph has related his situation to Pharaoh, Pharaoh agrees to bring Joseph's family to him, as Wilson (2004:180) argues: "Egypt is pictured very positively here, with an outline of the gracious provision by Pharaoh without strings attached." Joseph's words may have had the appearance of boasting, but they are now vindicated by the reaction of Pharaoh and his courtiers. Wehnam (1994:429) further argues that "Pharaoh's courtiers also approved". Pharaoh, in his generosity "although in the more formal language of a royal edict – confirm[s] that Joseph's latest plan also pleases Pharaoh" (Wilson 2004:180). The relationship between Pharaoh and Joseph indicates the closeness, and is shown more clearly when Pharaoh gives an order (Gn 45:17–20), and Joseph executes this order, providing garments for all his brothers (which they wore on special occasions), as well as animals, people, food and even wagons (Gn

45:21–23). Joseph’s character shows Pharaoh that he is a trustworthy man. As proof, “the repetition involved in Joseph carrying out Pharaoh’s decrees highlights how Pharaoh and Joseph are echoing each other” (Wilson 2004:180). Therefore, Pharaoh is very gracious in his speech (Gn 45:17) and believes that “Joseph will care for the country with even greater devotion if he and his family were to regard Egypt as their home” (Jacob 1974:306)

## **4.2 Relationship between Jacob and his sons**

This section takes into account Jacob’s attitude when faced with the report of his sons, and also deals with his sacrifices in Beersheba, followed by God’s order to him to go down to Egypt and His promise to be with him. It ends with the blessing of his sons and his grandchildren.

### **4.2.1 Jacob**

Jacob, who had previously been so willing to accept bad news (Gn 37:23), now finds it difficult to believe his sons (Gn 45:26). However, the words of Joseph and the provisions carried in the carts (Gn 45:27) compel him to believe (Longacre 1989:39). The theme of “life” reappears when the brothers return to Jacob and tell him that Joseph is still alive (Gn 45:26). When Jacob first hears this news from them “he was stunned; he could not believe them”(Gn 45:26). One can say that the “lie with which the brothers concealed their guilt had, after all a further effect” (Jacob 1974:98). When he accepts their words, his spirit is revived (Gn 45:27) and he exclaims “enough”, thus confirming that Joseph is still alive (Gn 45:28), and expressing a wish to go to him before he dies (Gn 45:28). From this point on, one can say that the narrator wishes to show that the father’s lament in the beginning (Gn 37:34f) has been stilled. Nevertheless, it can be seen that Jacob’s approach to death is transformed. Now he will not be brought down with sorrow to Sheol, but he will see his child and thereby experience the integrity of his life cycle, so that he can die in peace. Therefore, the focus on the restoration of the family relationship is emphasised by Jacob himself (Gn 45:28). He never mentions anything that Joseph’s brothers bring to him from Egypt, as his whole mind is focused on seeing Joseph. It could be said that Jacob’s character demonstrates the principle of “forgive and forget”.

God’s appearance to Jacob is also absent in the Joseph story. Beer-Sheba was a place to which the patriarch was connected (Gn 21:32–33; 22:19; 26:32–33; 28:10 and 46:1), but after God’s

appearance, he agrees to move to Egypt. The total number of the patriarch's family was sixty-six persons in all (Gn 46:26–27), which it would seem did not include the wives of Jacob's sons. Some readers find that "since this [66] is not a typological or symbolic number in the Bible, it must therefore represent a genuine calculation based on the data just recorded" (Wilson 2004:186; Sarna 1989:317), and consider it to be a rounded off number. The important character of Goshen, described as a fertile region in the "eastern part of the Nile Delta, is mentioned three times in verses 28–29, as if this location will be significant for the future story" (Wilson 2004:187), and is more explicitly mentioned in Genesis 46:34; 47:4, 6.

#### **4.2.2 Brothers**

The main focus with regard to Joseph's brothers' relationship with their father is firstly on their report to their father, and secondly, their complaints to their father about forgiveness between Joseph and themselves before he dies. In the report, they do not say what they have done to Joseph, by way of a confession, to their father. The text (Gn 45:26–27) seems to be quiet in this regard. In fact, before giving the report they were supposed to start with a confession to their father because they had lied to him by saying that Joseph had been devoured by a wild beast. They had also sinned by selling him into Egypt. It could be that their confession will appear in the way that they look after their father in his last days (Gn 50:15–17). The blessing from their father reveals the character of each son, according to each one's behaviour.

#### **4.3 Relationship between Joseph and his father**

This section will deal with Joseph's meeting with his father and Jacob's blessing of his two sons.

##### **4.3.1 Joseph**

The meeting between Joseph and his father is a significant event. The two men are overjoyed, and therefore the emotion emanating from this encounter is great. Jacob is overjoyed because Joseph was declared dead and Jacob is now seeing him face to face. Jacob is very emotional at seeing him again after twenty years. Eventually, the strong feelings cause Joseph to weep (Gn 46:29). Joseph's weeping signifies many things: the long absence from his father, the way he was put through torture and sold by his brothers in Egypt unbeknown to his father; his meeting

with his brother who refer to him as “one is lost”; and trying to explain the deep feelings that their father had and still has about the “one is lost”. Joseph’s feelings from deep down inside lead him to weep.

#### **4.3.2 Jacob**

Jacob’s reaction when he sees Joseph is genuine and shows a deep sense of relief when he claims: “I have seen for myself that you are still alive. Now I am ready to die” (Gn 46:30). Now he is seeing Joseph in the flesh. His words mean that if he were to die today he would have no regrets, because he has now seen his son who was declared dead. The principal action that reveals Jacob’s character in this section is the blessing. Firstly, Jacob blesses the Lord Almighty (El-Shaddai) who is “either highlighting the invincible power of God or referring to the mountains as God’s symbolic home” (Ps.121:1). He is the Lord before whom my fathers walked; in whose sight and under whose protection they were privileged to live; the Lord who has led me all my life long. “The piety of his fathers had been an active, conscious faith in God. Here, Jacob, looking back on his whole life in humble confession, now recognises that he has always been guarded by a faithful shepherd” (Jacob 1974:326). This attitude explains his relationship with the Lord Almighty, who was the Lord of his ancestors and is now and forever the Lord of Israel from where his name is given. He blesses him as he exclaims “I would not have dared to believe that I would see you again, but God has let me see more than any human imagination could expect”. “His eyes are dim with age, but God makes him capable of seeing a happiness which even the keenest foresight could not have perceived” (Jacob 1974:325).

Secondly, Israel, as a patriarch, calls on Ephraim and Manasseh, the sons of Joseph, and adopts and blesses them as his own sons. They would not be regarded as merely the sons of Joseph. This serves to maintain their link to their original family. They are for him those who will stay in the background, giving Joseph an opportunity to use the word “God” in his reply. Jacob blesses them so that God who has given them may be with them, as his father has done to him. Before blessing them, he makes them stand close to him (because of his age, he could not see), kisses and embraces them, then stretches out his right hand, lays it on each of their heads in “turn and, so to say, grasps his good fortune in his hands” (Jacob 1974:324). It is also as if they “had been brought with him to Egypt like all the others” (Jacob 1974:322). Israel also praises

the angel who has redeemed him from all evil, for he recognises that there was a protective angel at his side in all his miseries (Gn 48:16 cp. Gn 28:12; 32:2). Nevertheless, both of them are blessed (Gn 48:17–20), for the real blessing is in verse 15f, and verse 20 is its “enhancement and final confirmation” (Jacob 1974:327). In order to further pacify Joseph, he gives the same blessing to both children. He identifies them according to their age – first Ephraim, then Manasseh, in the same way as Reuben and Simeon are identified (Jacob 1974:322). However, the offspring born after his coming to Egypt shall belong to Joseph (Gn 48:6). Jacob seems to mean that Joseph has other children after Ephraim and Manasseh, but the text seems to be quiet about these other children. This verse raises two hypotheses: firstly, Joseph does not have any other children besides these two, and secondly, he has other sons, but as the vizier of Egypt, these children are Egyptians and are therefore not regarded as Jacob’s offspring. The first hypothesis seems to be plausible. The character of Jacob in this section is remarkable. Joseph’s children are not forgotten in the promise of land but replace Joseph and will have a part in its distribution – rather than grandsons, they are elevated to the rank of tribes. Thirdly, when he is about to die, this expression is always followed by his wishes with regard to a funeral. Jacob has already spoken about his last days. He wants to let Joseph know that “when God brings our people to the land of our fathers and you like me want to be buried in the Promised Land, here is a burial place for you”. This passage is connected to Genesis 47:29f, where Jacob speaks to Joseph about his last days, as well as to Genesis 50:24, which reveals the promise made to Joseph. Finally, he blesses all his sons, one by one, according to their attitude and character (Gn 49:1–28). Jacob’s character is shown in his wish to be buried in the land of his fathers, and also through his deep emotions. He has never forgotten the wife his first love – he cannot but remember her in his last hours, and he thus asks Joseph to bury him in the place where she is buried. One commentator argues that, when he is about to bless his grandsons, he begins with the lamentation: “Why could Rachel not live to see this! She cannot bless you as a living person; she will do it from her grave” (Jacob 1974:323).

#### **4.4 Relationship between Joseph and his brothers**

This section will focus on the instruction that Joseph gives to his brothers when the Pharaoh goes to meet them. It then examines the relationship between them after the death of their father, Jacob.



#### **4.4.1 Joseph**

After learning that his father and brothers are coming, Joseph does not show a negative attitude towards his brothers until they have settled in Goshen. He tries to show them how to behave, and gives them instructions they must follow. While some understand Joseph to be giving parting words of reassurance, it seems more likely that Joseph is giving them a gentle warning, being realistic enough to know that their characters have not been entirely transformed. Wilson (2004:181) by referring to Janzen (1993:175) argues that “he sees it as having a dual force: he offers them a wry word of caution (don’t fall to squabbling again) and reassurance (don’t be agitated by what you don’t fully understand)”.

#### **4.4.2 Brothers**

However, ever since the brothers have settled in Goshen, they have been afraid and thinking about their future if their father should die. All the time that they are in Egypt, they continue to bow down before Joseph, not because of his past dreams, but as a sign of respect for him. In some way, they consider themselves to be Joseph’s slaves (Gn 50:18) when they go to reassure themselves about their security after the death of their father. Therefore, they start to feel the pain of their guilt because of what they have done to Joseph (Gn 50:15), and try to find a way to reach an understanding with him. They decide to send a messenger to Joseph, reminding him about their situation after their father’s death. It seems as if the content of the message is a report of their meeting in Goshen with their father without Joseph (Gn 50:16–18) before he died. This can be felt in Joseph’s reaction (Gn 50:19). Nevertheless, Joseph is not the kind of person who will cry out for revenge. He reassures them before they come to Egypt (Gn 45:5, 7–11), and stands by what he said to them in the past (Gn 50:19–21). As a responsible official, he is bound by a professional code to fulfil his promise.

#### **4.5 Relationship between Jacob and Pharaoh**

This last section deals with Pharaoh’s meeting with Jacob and his blessing on all Egypt. It also reveals Pharaoh’s kindness towards Jacob, from the time of his settling in Goshen until his last days in Canaan.

#### **4.5.1 Pharaoh**

Indeed, it was a pleasure for Pharaoh to meet a patriarch, the father of Joseph: it was his responsibility to care about Joseph's father, in order to show their close relationship. His attitude towards Jacob is full of love and dignity. The question *kamah yemei shenei hayei'qa*: "how many are the days of the years of your life" is a pertinent question asked of Jacob. Why is Pharaoh interested in Jacob's age? The curiosity to know Jacob's age is one of the main points in their conversations. One researcher finds two reasons: firstly, it is normal and natural to ask an old man about his age and in this way make him talk of his life experiences. Secondly, the question no doubt refers to his special nature, which pushes Pharaoh to say: it is commendable that you, at your advanced age, have experienced much. I wish that your life may have a long and happy evening here. In any event, it is Jacob's responsibility to respond to this question, as has been mentioned with regard to his relationship with Pharaoh. Therefore, "the conversations between the two men seem to have been conventional and without content, as tends to be the case with audiences and receptions" (Westermann 1996:102). However, one finds repeatedly in the history of the patriarchs that such forms of encounter are taken very seriously, and that every word has its meaning and its functions. Pharaoh's question is intended to determine what is common to both of them. This question is understood by Jacob in the way that it "leads from childhood to the prime years of a man's life to old age and the approach of death" (Westermann 1996:103). Pharaoh's character, as revealed in his responsibility in taking a decision, indicates that he is an ideal model man. He never goes back on Joseph's wish when he talks about his father and his brothers.

#### **4.5.2 Jacob**

The impression one gets from the meeting with and the blessing of Pharaoh reveals a degree of misunderstanding. Was the meeting with Pharaoh a blessing or a greeting? Some scholars propose that "blessing" seems preferable to "greeting". If it refers to the meaning of *barak*, it can either mean "bless" or "greet", and thus ought to be translated as "to greet with a blessing". The context in which Jacob meets Pharaoh, and the way in which they meet and exchange words, reveals firstly that Jacob has blessed Pharaoh when he was introduced to him by Joseph (Gn 47:7). According to this study, the first blessing literally means a greeting. This greeting involves some dialogue between Jacob and Pharaoh, when the latter asks Jacob his age. It is a good introduction to their conversation. It also reveals the nature of their future relationship.

During this conversation between Jacob and Pharaoh, many suggestions and advice for being safe in the country were of course given by Pharaoh. Secondly, during this meeting with Pharaoh, by referring to the second blessing (Gn 47:10), some commentators argue that Jacob prays for a long life for Pharaoh. If this is the case, this study argues that the second blessing can be viewed as a blessing. Everything has been done – even the decision regarding Jacob’s security has now been made. The patriarch, before “he went out from his presence”, appears to bless him with the words “longevity, prosperity and success”.

In many tribes in different countries, particularly in the Arabic context, before one enters someone’s house one is supposed to pronounce a blessing at the gate or door: *Salam* or *as’ salam ma le ku*: literally meaning “may peace be with you”, followed by the word *al-barka*. The root of this word comes from the same verb *barak’* in Hebrew and, in this case, it does not mean an absolute blessing in its real sense. However, it can be translated as a greeting followed by a blessing.

Another point which draws one’s attention is Jacob’s answer to the Pharaoh’s question regarding his age. The expression “few and hard” needs to be taken into consideration. Jacob tries to analyse his life, by referring to his forefathers and his past, when he says “few and hard”. “Few”, when he tries to compare himself to his forefathers, is really few. Abraham, his grandfather, lived to be a hundred and seventy-five, and was satisfied with life (Gn 25:7–8). Isaac, his father, also lived to the ripe old age of a hundred and eighty years (Gn 35:28–29), even more than Abraham. At that time Jacob was one hundred and thirty and in his last days. However, the text states that he lived in Egypt for seventeen years before he died, which means that he died at the age of one hundred and forty seven (Gn 47:9, 28), which is less than his forefathers. Jacob’s life has been “hard” when he compares it to that of his forefathers, as he has been wronged and has experienced pain during his life. Westermann (1996:103) mentions some of these things, and argues that “this is not simply an insightful description of his existence. Jacob stands before Pharaoh as the one who had been saved with his family from the famine, the one who had been reunited with his son (Joseph), the one protected in the midst of many threats”. He adds that “one can understand what he says here of his life in terms of the blessing” (Westermann 1996:103). Nevertheless, the situation that Jacob qualifies as “hard”

comes from deep down inside and can be interpreted in different ways. In referring to Westermann, who seems to be focused on the blessing, the researcher totally agrees with him in terms of having many sons. Jacob, since the time of his forefathers, is the only one who has been greatly blessed. He needs to be known as the patriarch. However, in terms of his life, one can say that his sons have caused him lifelong unhappiness and misery, a life that is full of suffering. As Westermann (1996:103) argues, “just this has been the mature fruit of his experience with God. And these experiences formed the answer that Jacob gives to Pharaoh”.

## **5 The acts**

As has been previously mentioned with regard to the characters, they are also significantly linked to the acts/deeds of each in this section. This study focuses on the responsibility of Joseph (as vizier of Egypt) towards Pharaoh, who is the ruler of Egypt. It will try to reveal the kind of relationship between them in terms of their responsibility. From there, Joseph and his father and brothers will be discussed in terms of their responsibility. Finally, the researcher will try to re-examine Jacob’s responsibility towards Pharaoh, and then towards his sons in his last days. A summary will then conclude this chapter.

### **5.1 Responsibility of Joseph towards Pharaoh**

#### **5.1.1 Joseph**

Joseph’s responsibility focuses more on his duty, as ordered by Pharaoh. He is supposed to perform his duty well, as all of Egypt trusts him. When Joseph comes before Pharaoh, he only mentions their flocks and herds (Gn 47:1). Wilson (2004:189), referring to Sarna (1989:319), argues that “Egyptian kings possessed vast herds of cattle. Rameses III, for example, is said to have employed 3264 mainly foreign men to take care of his cattle”. Joseph’s responsibility was to provide grain for Pharaoh’s family, and to care for and feed them, according to the number of their dependents, as ordered by Pharaoh.

In his agricultural organisation when the famine was severe, Joseph gathered up all the money in the land of Egypt, as in Canaan (Gn 47:14), which came to him as a faithful servant of the state and paid it into the king’s treasury. The task of the courtier is to advance the interests of his master by making him prosper and keeping Egypt alive, and Joseph has certainly

accomplished that (Humphreys 1988:147; Von Rad 1972:410; Wilson 2004:194).

People spent all the money they had, and started exchanging food for cattle, horses, flocks of sheep and asses (Gn 47:15–17). The starvation was so severe that people did not cease to cry about Joseph’s moral responsibility. It was still only man and soil; the one cannot exist without the other. “The soil’s food is the seed (grain); growth and production its life and procreation” (Jacob 1974:317). Here they draw Joseph’s attention to taking his responsibility and buying both, and both shall be enslaved to Pharaoh (Gn 47:19–20). Joseph does not “accept their offer of self-enslavement, but as they alienate themselves from the soil, he makes the change effective by relocating the people, town by town” (Jacob 1974:317). It is very clear that the Egyptians themselves make the offer to slaves (Gn 47:19, 25), and Joseph responds to their request (Gn 47:20–21). Joseph gives them something of value in exchange for which they trade grain for money (Gn 47:14), grain for livestock (Gn 47:16–17), grain for the land (Gn 47:19), and, when they become slaves, he provides them with land to work on and seed to sow (Gn 47:23). They are only focused on what they have gained (life), not on what they have lost. However, the Egyptians appear to be grateful, “and seem to embrace quite willingly the kind of slavery to Pharaoh that will give them enough to live on” (Wilson 2004:194). This excludes the priests, who received a food allowance from Pharaoh, for they have no need to buy and sell their soil (Gn 47:22). Joseph’s responsibility becomes more difficult. After the purchase of the land and the relocation of the people, Joseph gives them seed, expressly stating the relationship between Pharaoh, the soil and its cultivators. Pharaoh is now the owner – he must supply the seed, but can also determine the distribution of the products, as it stipulates that “give one fifth ... to Pharaoh, four fifths shall be yours” (Gn 47:23–24). The expression “you have saved our lives; if it please your lordship, you shall be Pharaoh’s slaves” (Gn 47:25) shows the agreement of the people, as the arrangement of agrarian conditions in Egypt pleased the Egyptians.

### **5.1.2 Pharaoh**

The important point to be noted is that “when the report reached the royal palace ... Pharaoh and his officials were pleased” (Gn 45:16). In fact, this is supposed to be a misunderstanding between Joseph and Pharaoh’s court. It could be considered a disgrace for them to have a foreigner, a slave released from prison, immediately attain a royal rank. Fortunately, they were

all happy when Joseph's brothers came to him. "It is a handsome testimony to Joseph and his popularity, but also to Pharaoh and his servants, that they cordially share in his joy, and also considered it as serving the interests of the country" (Jacob 1974:305). It seems that Joseph expresses himself in a decidedly Hebrew style, for he selects good, and even choice, Hebrew words (Jacob 1974:306). In his speech, he takes responsibility for the travel expenses, and also orders a splendid and honourable reception: "they shall take wagons from the land of Egypt from the official transportation" (Gn 45:18–19). This order identifies the strangers as guests of the king. Splendid wagons for the children and women, but the "father will be carried like the ark of the covenant" (Jacob 1974:306). Pharaoh's speech picks up on Joseph's words, and gives him the greatest pleasure by publicly honouring his father, in seeing the house of Israel brought to Egypt by Pharaoh's invitation (Jacob 1974:306). All these expressions describe the quality of responsible people such as Pharaoh, who are loving, kind and open to everybody, including foreigners.

## **5.2 Responsibility of Joseph towards his father**

### **5.2.1 Joseph**

After all the great emotion, Joseph's responsibility towards his father focuses more on his life. Firstly, Joseph does his duty by bringing his father to Pharaoh. It is very important, as a vizier, for him to take the initiative to officially present his father to Pharaoh's court (Gn 47:7). This initiative was salutary to the whole world. With Pharaoh's blessing, all of humanity was blessed. Secondly, Joseph's responsibility was also focused on his father's life in terms of Jacob's health. When he hears that his father is sick, he pays him a visit, together with his two sons. During this visit, Joseph's sons see their grandfather and he blesses them. The last and most important of Joseph's responsibilities towards his father is related to the last days of Jacob, with particular reference to the oath (Gn 47:29–31). It was Jacob's aim to be reassured that his son would bury him in Canaan. Therefore, Joseph takes a solemn oath to his father to do what he asks (Gn 50:2–14), and it is done according to his words. His death is glorified in all of Egypt, because of Joseph's position in Pharaoh's court.

### **5.2.2 Jacob**

In this episode, when Jacob hears that his son Joseph is alive, he experiences a great shock, as it

is so unexpected. He never believed that his son was alive and indeed in power in Egypt (Gn 45:26). In any event, denial is a natural reaction to anything new. It is like a dream to him, but hope beyond hope has been realised. He is convinced by the testimony and evidence presented by his sons, and he states: *wayomer Yisrael rab* (Gn 45:28), which means “enough”. *Rab* has two meanings. It means, on the one hand, with an exclamation point: “stop!”, when there is a difficult situation. Someone could interrupt with this word *rab*, just to say stop or to keep attention. One finds this word when there is a misunderstanding, or when no one is listening to each other. However, in this situation with Jacob, it means “no doubt”. He is convinced by the proof shown by his sons. In this regard, he says: *Yosef beni hai elkah we’er’enouh betserem amouth...* “Joseph my son is alive I will go and I will see him before I die”. *Elkah* (qal imperfect *halak* “go”) and *erenouh* (qal imperfect *ra’ah* “see”) are two action verbs. Jacob is definitely beyond emotion, which no longer governs him. In this case, Israel’s responsibility is more focused on his faith in believing that this situation is real.

Israel now has the privilege of being in the land of Egypt, invited by Pharaoh, as a foreigner to forever possess the land. Jacob, before he leaves, goes to Beer-Sheba to consult God. Beer-Sheba was the place of Abraham’s descendants, a place where they went to consult God (Gn 46:1 cp 21:33; 22:19). There, the Lord of his father convinces him to go down to Egypt with these words: “I am God, God of your father. Do not be afraid to go down to Egypt ... I shall go with you ...” (Gn 46:2–4). God, who talks to Jacob, is the God of his father and ancestor, Abraham. He is the God who was revealed to his ancestor Abraham, and he is still His God (Gn 28:13–15; 35:11–13). Therefore, knowing the difficulties of living in a foreign country, Jacob finds it better to first consult the God of his father before he leaves for Egypt to meet his son. One more time, one finds that Israel’s responsibility is towards the God of his father. As a responsible person, he is supposed to consult God in order to determine whether or not the Almighty will allow him to leave Canaan. God’s answer was his point of departure.

### **5.3 Joseph’s responsibility towards his brothers**

#### **5.3.1 Joseph**

As was mentioned with regard to Joseph’s character, it is very clear that God makes Joseph a powerful and responsible person, not only *adon* (lord) over Pharaoh’s house, but also *moshel*

(authority, ruler) over all of Egypt. Genesis 45:9 is full of imperative words: *maharou* (hurry!), *alou* (go back), *redah* (come down) and *ta'amod* (not tarry, delay). These orders are to show his father that he is able to care for him and provide abundantly, so that they will not be impoverished during the next five severe years of famine while he is the *adon* and *moshel* over all of Egypt. Therefore, as Wilson (2004:180) comments, "Egypt is pictured very positively here, with an outline of the gracious provision by Pharaoh without strings attached". As a responsible person and Pharaoh's associate, he is supposed to make a decision. It is interesting to learn that all the decisions he makes are with Pharaoh's agreement. As proof, Pharaoh's words of generosity although in the more formal language of royal edict, confirm that Joseph's latest plan also pleases Pharaoh and that all his countries approve of it, as speculated by scholars (Wilson 2004:180; Westermann 1986:147).

Joseph's responsibility is shown in two ways: firstly, he is very busy preparing for the departure of his father, like a mother who takes care of her sons when they are travelling. Secondly, as a father, before they leave, he dresses them in festal garments, with different gifts and provisions for the journey, with special attention given to Benjamin and his father. Thus, as one researcher argues: "he treats them to such a distinction and, so to say, raises them to equal rank with himself" (Jacob 1974:306). He then gives them advice: *al-tiregezou badareq* (Do not quarrel on the way) (Gn 45:24). His advice focuses on two things: Joseph thinks that they will reproach each other about what they did to their brother, as Reuben continues to claim. The second is that they will be jealous about what Joseph has done for Benjamin during dinner and in terms of the last gifts. As he knows, they are capable of being jealous of Benjamin. It could be that they will do the same to him as they did to Joseph.

When his father arrives in Goshen, Joseph's eagerness to meet his father is evident – after having been reconciled with his brothers, he goes to meet his father and weeps on his neck (Gn 46:29). He "does not rely on his authority in Egypt, but (rather) harnesses his chariot, goes up to meet his father, and shows affection towards him in a manner similar to his love for Benjamin" (Wilson 2004:187). One could say that Joseph is on a high.

After this, he instructs his father and his brothers concerning their occupation as shepherds.



Joseph, as a responsible person, knows the responsibility of living together with the flock and herds. In this instruction, there is a misunderstanding among some commentators. It seems to be saying that “Joseph is telling his brothers to say to Pharaoh that they are *aneshei miqeneh*, literally meaning keepers of livestock, not *ro’eh so’n*”, literally meaning shepherds. It could be that “the brothers ignore Joseph’s instructions, saying that they are shepherds” (Coats 1976:52; Wilson 2004:188). In any case, his instructions to his father before Pharaoh’s arrival (Gn 46:31–34) are to dwell in Goshen with all the family, so that they can gaze freely on the flock without concern. Joseph’s strategy was carefully prepared in order to ensure that his brothers could live in Goshen, the rich and fertile land, and be separated from the Egyptians. As every shepherd is an abomination, it is better to keep the flock at a distance without any contempt, as some scholars say: “it is not hatred of shepherds as such, but rather the nomadic shepherds” (Westermann 1986:168; Vergote 1959:188).

After instructing his father and brothers, he goes to Pharaoh and tells him that his father and brothers, with their flocks and herds and all that they possess, have come from the land of Canaan. They are now in the land of Goshen (Gn 47:1). Joseph’s instructions to his father and brothers are understood by them when they present themselves as shepherds (Gn 46:34). A researcher argues that “consistently and diplomatically Joseph holds to his original purpose” (Jacob 1974:313), when referring to Genesis 45:10; 46:34. It also seems as if Joseph chooses the land of Goshen for his family before he thinks of bringing them. If one refers to the last text, one can say that Joseph’s action as a responsible person is strategic, as he plans everything beforehand.

### **5.3.2 Brothers**

However, Joseph’s brothers’ responsibility is not further developed in this section. They are known as shepherds or keepers of livestock. In any event, one does not see any misunderstanding between them, as was mentioned in previous chapters. Everything seems to be going well in terms of their relationship with Joseph. After acknowledging Joseph as their brother and vizier over all of Egypt, they continue to bow down before him, not because of his past dreams, but as a sign of respect for him. It is also their responsibility to reassure themselves about their life in Egypt after the death of their father. Therefore, they send a

messenger to Joseph. This study tries to argue that the messenger they send to Joseph is Judah, who is their spokesman.

Something that is not clear is the meeting they hold without Joseph. It seems to be ridiculous on the one hand, and salutary on the other. The reason they do not include Joseph is significant. One does not learn when or where this meeting takes place. Joseph is confused when he sees the messenger presenting the report. It is irresponsible of them to keep a secret between them, even though they have been entirely forgiven. Why did Jacob himself not take the initiative of talking officially to his son Joseph in the presence of his father, so that the “axe of the war been completely buried”, thus putting an end to the meanness of the past and starting a new life with or without their father. The brothers do not show responsibility towards Joseph in this regard.

## **5.4 Responsibility of Jacob towards Pharaoh**

### **5.4.1 Jacob**

Jacob, who has never seen the king before, comes into his presence *wayebareq yakob eth Pare'oh*, literally meaning “and Jacob blessed Pharaoh”. In the presence of Pharaoh, Jacob blesses him by expressing good wishes for his welfare. It is also a prayer which means “praised be he who has given of his splendour to human beings” (Jacob 1974:314). This prayer probably contains a wish for the king’s long life, as many people did for kings and leaders (cp. 2Sm 16:16).

### **5.4.2 Pharaoh**

When Joseph’s family comes to the land of Goshen, Pharaoh does not reply to them, but instead welcomes them when they present themselves as strangers in Egypt. He does not address his answer directly to them, but “his gracious approval has the character of an order given to the responsible minister; this is all the more so that the favour concerns this minister personality” (Jacob 1974:314). Pharaoh’s wish and thinking can be interpreted as follows: You must certainly be very happy to have your family with you now, and I am glad to favour them, which means you. For all the responsibility of Egypt is given to him, when it is stipulated that “the land of Egypt is before you; settle them in the best of the land” (Gn 47:6). If they desire the land of Goshen, let them do as they like. Pharaoh’s intervention is to show Joseph how

much he appreciates the presence of his family and approves of their choice of being in the land of Goshen. Joseph can elevate his family's position to that of shepherds. Therefore, "it is all the more disgraceful of the later Pharaoh to enslave their descendants" (Jacob 1974:314).

## **5.5 Responsibility of Jacob towards his sons**

### **5.5.1 Jacob**

When they leave Canaan to go to Goshen (the place where Israel will dwell), Jacob sends Judah before him to Joseph in order to let him know that he is on his way to Goshen. After informing Joseph about Jacob, Joseph also sends Judah back to Jacob in order to inform him that Joseph is coming to Goshen (Gn 45:28–29). Before Jacob dies, he asks a favour: "I have a favour to ask" (Gn 47:29). Then he calls his son and asks him to bury him in the place where his fathers were buried (Gn 25:9; 35:29). It is a will, a vow that his son is bound to execute (Gn 47:29–31). In order to ensure that Joseph will bury him with his fathers, away from Egypt, Joseph must swear to Jacob that he will do as he says (Gn 47:31) for Joseph might be able to refer to his oath before Pharaoh. As one researcher argues, "you have brought me here and you must carry me back" (Jacob 1974:320). However, Jacob's wish does not contain any antipathy towards Egypt or its paganism; it is simply that he wants to be buried elsewhere, that is, in the grave of his fathers. Indeed, Jacob wants to be buried in Canaan because it is his home and the common grave of the patriarchs. Some scholars argue that "Jacob's provision for his future removal is a powerful symbol that God's people will not be in Egypt forever" (Wilson 2004:195; Wenham 1994:449–450). Thereafter, Jacob bows himself, perhaps as a gesture of thanksgiving to God so that he can die peacefully.

Before his death, Jacob wants to let his children, including his grandchildren, know that although they are really prosperous here in Egypt, "the land in which they shall live will be Canaan. Jacob's meaning is that they are certainly prospering here in Egypt, but have a high destiny, promised by God which can be fulfilled only in Canaan" (Jacob 1974:322) – therefore, they cannot stay there forever. According to God's promise, the people of Israel shall return to Canaan, where God prepares for them the "land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex 3:8, 17). Jacob's responsibility is also focused on the future, particularly in the land of Canaan, where this land will be distributed among the sons of Israel. Knowing that it will be difficult for

Joseph's tribes, Jacob tries to fix the situation by keeping Joseph's two sons for himself and elevating them to the rank of tribal chiefs, even though they did not come to Egypt with Jacob, so that they might benefit from Canaan. This might mean that Joseph also rises in rank and is given a twofold position – he is a son of Jacob, but as the father of tribal chiefs he becomes equal with Jacob himself (Jacob 1974:323). Now he has established a “house of Joseph” within Israel with Joseph as its patriarch, which Joseph has himself sent to Canaan. Before Jacob dies, he gives his beloved son Joseph the highest honour and sign of love. He places him on a level with himself to become the fourth patriarch of the people of Israel. Joseph receives a position from his father that will have “its roots in his own people and will be more lasting than that given to him by Pharaoh. Jacob's motive is his love for his son Joseph” (Jacob 1974:323).

Another responsibility given to his son is with regard to his death. According to their culture, some people prefer to be buried in their country or in the city where they were born. Jacob asks his son to bury him in the land of Canaan specifically where Rachel is buried in the cave of Machpelah. This is an important responsibility for Joseph for “the common place of burial is a testimony to and symbol of the unity for all the people who are descended from the parents” (Jacob 1974:323).

### **5.5.2 Brothers**

In fact, the brothers are ashamed (Gen 45:15) about what they did to Joseph. Their responsibility is to accept all that has happened and ask their brother Joseph for forgiveness. However, the text seems to be quiet about forgiveness. Even Reuben and Judah, as the elder brothers and spokesmen, did not ask for forgiveness on behalf of all of them. Their silence is not responsible. However, in terms of decisions taken by Joseph, it shows that “the sons of Israel did so” (Gen 45:21). Therefore, in terms of the relationship between Israel and the vizier of Egypt (Gn 45:28–29), one can see that Judah plays an important role. “He is the direct object of the verb *‘shalah’*, and is placed first in the sentence, presumably for emphasis” (Wilson 2004:187). Judah is a direct object of the verb (Hamilton 1995:601). Wilson (2004:187) by referring to scholars (Longacre 1989:56; Janzen 1993:17; Sailhamer 1990:263) finds his responsibility very clear and argues: “in the light of Judah's emerging leadership (Gn 43:8–10; 44:14, 18–34), and in view of the projection of future leadership (Gn 49:8–12), this appears to

be another hint of Judah's special role as leader".

## 6 Summary

In sum, the final situation seen in the light of the initial situation may be regarded as parallelism within the narrative. The circumstances involving Joseph, his brothers and his father in the initial situation, taking into consideration all aspects of the characters and responsibility, become connected in the final situation. In addition, there is no doubt that the final situation can be treated on its own without taking into account the initial situation.

However, Joseph's deep relationship with his father in the initial situation becomes re-established in the final situation. The misunderstanding between Joseph and his brothers referring to his dreams comes to be concretised by "bow down". Therefore, the final situation is a mirror image of the initial one. As a responsible person, this action is incontestable; Joseph is owed a great deal of gratitude. Because of the severe famine, people could pay for food as long as they had money – their herds, as movable property, were another form of money. When all their money and herds were gone, they were obliged to offer themselves and their soil to Joseph in order to get food. Although Joseph did not ask them to do this, they were obliged to do so – if not, they would die.

Through the servile attitude of people for whom bread was more important than liberty (Jacob 1974:318), Egypt became a "house of bondage". The people were not so greatly attached to their soil that they would rather die than surrender it. "In servility, they literally thrust their enslavement on Pharaoh as thanks for the expected food" (Jacob 1974:318). Joseph, the former slave, bought the soil, but the people were only relocated. "He even avoids the word "slaves" in his reply. The tax of twenty percent on the product is moderate, compared to agrarian conditions in other countries of antiquity" (Jacob 1974:318). Israel regarded nothing as more precious than liberty, and could not imagine the slavery of one Israelite to another (Jacob 1974:319).

The conclusion of the Joseph narrative now begins to overlap with the conclusion of the Jacob story, and ultimately with the conclusion of the patriarch narratives in general. The rest of the

book of Genesis brings together issues that relate to the past and the future of the patriarch's family, now settled in the land of Goshen.

I owe the last word to Wilson (2004:183), who claims that this section concludes the Joseph story, "as it outlines events such as the reunion between Jacob and Joseph, the agricultural reforms of Joseph, the settlement of the brothers in Egypt, the final removal of uncertainty in fraternal relations, and ultimately, the death of both Jacob and Joseph".

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **CONCLUSION**

The last chapter of this dissertation will focus on the importance of growth: from being irresponsible to being responsible. It will take into consideration the issue of wisdom, treated within the framework of the ancient Israelite wisdom teachers, which will be grounded by highlighting the differences between ancient Israel wisdom and the Egyptian wisdom writings, that is, the Teaching of Amenemope. It will then deal with the reading of the Joseph narrative according to the quinary scheme, which is the focus, as has already been mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation.

The importance of growth from being irresponsible to being responsible will be explored in the context of the Joseph narrative as a wisdom narrative. The importance of growth from being irresponsible to being irresponsible will take into consideration the elements of the quinary scheme: (1) the initial situation, (2) the complication, (3) the transforming action; (4) the denouement and (5) the final situation. Finally, the conclusion will summarise the finding of these sections.

#### **1 The Joseph narrative as wisdom narrative**

The nature of Joseph's wisdom is the main point of the Joseph narrative. Where did Joseph get the wisdom to deal with his experiences from Potiphar's house to the throne of Pharaoh? Ancient Israelite wisdom is focused on the fear of the Lord, which is the beginning of knowledge and serves as the crowning achievement of wisdom, which is also the basis of their faith. His steadfastness in refusing his master's wife's proposition and his willingness to interpret dreams show his responsibility and devotion to helping others. Joseph was exalted to the position of personal assistant to Pharaoh and is addressed as a king. What then is the connection between wisdom and the Joseph narrative? This question turns one's attention to the Joseph narrative itself and the fact that the Joseph narrative is connected to the rest of the Pentateuch. However, the Joseph narrative is not history, but a story which relates the chronological order that it is supposed to present. Therefore, the Joseph narrative is closely related to earlier wisdom writings as a manifestation of the educational ideal of Ancient

Israelite wisdom.

Joseph's character, however, is moulded by the "fear of God", which is the main focus of Joseph's life. Therefore, there is no doubt that Joseph's wisdom, which consisted of his ability to read the soul of another person, to elucidate his vague thoughts and anxieties, and also to give practical advice, came from God who was the first and last subject of Joseph's attention before turning to practical matters. Nevertheless, Joseph's teaching touches the heart of Pharaoh, who finally says to his servants: "can we find such a man this in whom is the spirit of God?"

## **2 The quinary scheme**

As previously mentioned, the quinary scheme focuses on five points. I will therefore focus on the importance of growth which takes into consideration (1) the initial situation and (2) the complication. Then, it links this to (3) the transforming action which will focus more on Joseph's life experiences. Finally, (4) the denouement and (5) the final situation will focus in the importance of growth in responsibility.

### **2.1 The initial situation**

By reading the Joseph narrative attentively according to the quinary scheme, one may see that, in the initial situation, Joseph appears irresponsible towards his brothers. Before focusing on Joseph's irresponsibility, his father's and brothers irresponsible actions in this section, that is, the initial situation must be kept in mind. The irresponsibility of Joseph's family is seen by the way in which Jacob, in his character and actions, favours Joseph by making him a special tunic and trusting him more than his other sons. Unfortunately, his irresponsible actions characterised by envy and favouritism, affected the other sons. According to his brothers, Joseph is an arrogant young boy and a tale-bearer. He does not know when to speak and when to hold his tongue; he stirs up anger by his words; he praises himself. This irresponsibility shattered the peace in the family. Therefore, the gift of the robe causes his siblings to feel inferior.

Joseph's irresponsibility is viewed in terms of being a tale-bearer. His brothers were not able to stand it. The expressions: "hate even more", "could not speak to him peacefully" or "harsh



words for him”, “their hatred of him became still great”, “were jealous”, “were anguished, were stirred or agitated” (Gn 37:4, 5, 8), characterises their extreme enmity and intense hostility towards Joseph. Even one was to say that Jacob’s favouritism is utterly free of criticism, the wisdom would advise prudence.

Therefore, it can be said that Joseph’s irresponsibility is linked to his immaturity. In the initial situation, Joseph in his overzealousness was acting as an immature boy who does not how to hold his tongue. Therefore, Joseph’s irresponsibility is focused on trust, submission and respect towards his father, by accomplishing his mission and bringing back a report, as mentioned in the initial situation. The complication of this irresponsible situation will be dealt with as the second point of being irresponsible.

Jacob decides to find out about his sons, who are herding the flock far from Hebron. The only emissary who is still able to go and check on the well-being of his sons at Shechem is his beloved son, Joseph. Unfortunately, Jacob’s decision to send Joseph places him in danger. From the danger is presented in the long distance he has to travel to fetch his brothers, then the imminent danger when he reaches his brothers. All the actions: putting him in the pit, selling him and bringing him to Egypt, were already premeditated.

Therefore, Joseph, because of his reputation as a reliable emissary whom Jacob trusts, and his pride in improving his own relationship with his father denote his zealous, and also his reckless immaturity. The courage, ability and readiness to take on a mission show that Joseph is determined to obey his father. Nevertheless, Reuben’s action in trying to save him followed by Judah’s action in selling him and the scenario around “dipped long robe with sleeves in the blood of the goat” show that Joseph is with them no more. He is already gone. Thereafter, the concealment of their deed takes place. The results of the brothers’ deed inevitably affect Jacob and result in his immense grief, anguish and mourning. The unhappy father collapses at the heartbreaking thought that his beloved Joseph has been torn to pieces by wild beasts. He spends the rest of his time on the ground to observe the custom of mourning for the dead until his own death.

## 2.2 The complication

The irresponsibility involved in this complication is the issue of Jacob as father who was supposed to be wise before he sends Joseph to his brothers, because as a father, he knew what was happening between his sons. It also involves the immaturity of Joseph's brothers in their deed. They finally ended up with the same act and conclusion which made them irresponsible. Their guilt is grounded in reality, because they knew what they had done to their brother, and how this would affect their father. It is really beyond human understanding, but is nevertheless the reality, "the brothers are concerned to protect their legitimate right". One could say that the decision to put Joseph in the pit was made by consensus.

This complicated scheme involves some remorse in his brothers. Firstly, as a consequence of selling Joseph to Egypt, he would be lost to them. Secondly, how could they tell their father about this tragedy? By showing their father the robe dipped in blood, is this proof enough that a wild beast had devoured him? They caused Jacob, their father, agony because the robe dipped in blood proved that the tragedy of Joseph's death was definitely true. Indeed, the growth of irresponsibility continues in Joseph's brothers. After this overwhelming situation, the guilt further caused misunderstandings between brothers themselves. This led to Judah leading his family to another place which was not sanctioned by God. This section forms a so-called bridge in the Joseph narrative, which links the events of Genesis 37 and 39. The expression: "about that time Judah left his brothers" (Gn 38:1), followed by "now Joseph had been taken down to Egypt" (Gn 39:1), forms a redactional bridge which indicates the misunderstanding between Judah and his brothers. It seems clear in our minds that the "departure from" of Judah, may be a consequence of the sale of Joseph which affects the depth of their father's grief. In the Joseph narrative, Judah is the one who realised that "murdering Joseph was senseless (pointless) when they could gain a profit by selling him" (Gn 37:26–27). Unfortunately his descending from Hebron to the Canaanite shows his irresponsibility. The same consequences that were suffering by Jacob with regard to his son Joseph are seemly experienced by Judah with regard to his family. The fact that Judah failed with Tamar was scandalous and forbidden. The story of Judah and Tamar forms part of Joseph's narrative and cannot stand on its own. It is important to note that the narrator finds it better to include it in Joseph's narrative. These situations draw our attention to irresponsibility in the Joseph narrative and this opens the way to the transforming

action which is the next point of focus.

### **2.3 The transforming action**

The transforming action, which is the third part of our quinary scheme, focuses on the Joseph's experiences as slave away from his family. This section is a bridge between the importance of growth from being irresponsible to being responsible, which will be discussed in the next part of this chapter. It takes into consideration Joseph's life as an immature young man, which will be modelled on the many experiences he had from Potiphar's house via the prison to Pharaoh's court as the second in command of Egypt.

As a result of the irresponsible situation that is the poor relationship with his family, particularly with his brothers, Joseph ends up by being sold out of Canaan. Now Joseph finds himself being sold as a slave and led into Egypt. One could say that the actual situation Joseph is faced with reveals another "transformation" in his life. He must be daunted, angry and in despair. However, the furnace of sorrow became for him the melting-pot in which his character was forged. Far away from his family, Joseph's life would be moulded according to the context in which he was under God's control.

In this situation, Joseph, who was characterised as tale-bearer and as arrogant, is faced with some experiences in Egypt which have a great effect or impact on his life. His first experience occurred in Potiphar's house where he was a servant suffered injustices and ended up in prison because of his master's wife. Nevertheless, in his affliction, and because of his integrity, his life was moulded towards an important purpose. The second experience occurred in prison because the head of the guard trusted him and placed him in a high position over the other prisoners because of his ability to interpret dreams. However, he was not able to explain his own dreams when he was with his family. The last experience was after he had left prison, when he went to the Pharaoh's court as an interpreter of dreams, and was then elevated to the position of vizier of Egypt. One could say that the three experiences modelled and transformed Joseph. These experiences are also the beginning of knowledge in the Joseph narrative. Therefore, wisdom can be seen as the main point of Joseph's success.

It is not the “old” Joseph that is referred to in the initial and complication situation, but the “new” Joseph moulded by the circumstances that help him to become responsible. The way he managed in Potiphar’s house as attendant, the manner in which he acted against his master’s wife: “Think of my master,” he said; “he leaves the management of his whole house to me; he has trusted me with all he has. I am as important in this house as he is, and he has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How can I do such a wicked thing? It is sin against God” (Gn 39:8–9). As a slave in a strange country, he is neither alone nor forsaken, because God is with him. In everything he undertakes the Lord helps him to succeed. Therefore, Joseph finds favour with his master and serves him. His master makes him overseer of his house and puts all that belongs to him in Joseph’s hands. This confirms that Joseph has won his master’s personal favour, and has been appointed his personal attendant. His master grants him far-reaching authority after observing his work and discovering the source of his constant success. Everything was blessed, grew and multiplied in the house and field because of Joseph.

Joseph’s humility was not only towards his master, but also to the whole household, including his mistress even she had intended to seduce him. Even in the prison, Joseph won the favour of the governor of the guardhouse, who put him in charge of the prisoners, and he directed all their work. Nevertheless, Joseph becomes a victim of flagrant injustice, which deprives him of his privileges. However, he never loses his honour or sins against God. Joseph becomes Pharaoh’s personal assistant and is addressed as a king. Wisdom is the centre point of his life which is remodelled and transformed.

## **2.4 The denouement**

The growth of responsibility takes into consideration the fourth and the fifth point, that is, the “denouement” and the “final situation” respectively. This section includes Joseph’s rendezvous with his brothers for the first time in twenty-five years. It ends with the final situation which is the conclusion of this dissertation. As was previously mentioned, the denouement cannot be developed without linking it to the complication; the final situation then also links up with the initial situation. The situation which involves Jacob, Joseph and his brothers in the complication is balanced and becomes the turning point of the narrative. It is very interesting to

note that this section reveals or is the centre of the entire narrative.

As is related by the narrator, there is famine in the whole world and Jacob's family is obliged to go and fetch some grain in Egypt. This presents Joseph with an opportunity to meet his brothers for the first time in twenty-five years. In fact, Joseph never expected to see his brothers. Therefore the questions arise: What will happen when he sees them for the first time? When his brothers reached him, "will they know or recognise him". As a mature and transformed man, Joseph kept calm and tried to find out more about them even though he knew and recognised his brothers. His maturity made him behave as vizier of Egypt and not in the same way as his brothers. He starts by speaking very roughly, because he is after all human, then he feels emotional, but he stands by his decisions. However, the thrust of the matter appears to be that he did not treat them as one would treat one's brothers, but simply played the role of an Egyptian official. Is Joseph seeking vengeance, reconciliation, punishment or something else? Nevertheless, as vizier of Egypt he was responsible to Pharaoh. Joseph decided to put them through a few tests to find out their character, and decided to detain Simeon as a hostage. Was this because he was the one who had suggested that Joseph should be killed? Then he lets nine of the brothers go free while they return to Canaan in order to bring his brother Benjamin to Egypt. Joseph does not intend to punish them, but genuinely tests them to find out whether his brothers are telling the truth, even treating them as spies although he knew that they were not. However, one could say that Joseph's test of his brothers by disguising his face and dress, by playing the role of a foreigner, by assuming the identity of an Egyptian, only speaking to them through an interpreter, becomes complicated as it was developed around his brothers' attitude towards him when they were deciding to kill him or to sell him Egypt. There may be parallelism between the way Joseph treats his brothers and the way his brothers treated him in the fourth chapter. However, the complicated action takes place when his brothers took his tunic to his father and this is similar to the fact that the brothers went back without one of their brother's Simeon.

Is it possible to speculate that Joseph's actions are motivated by revenge? He wants to make his brothers suffer for what they did to him. The punishment is exacted and the scales of justice begin to balance. Somehow, there is a turmoil and expression of remorse that Joseph is

experiencing through his brothers. In any event, whether they are guilty or innocent, the brothers were in a predicament. Joseph's action of detaining Simeon as a hostage because of the cup hidden in the bag of the youngest brother Benjamin proves his maturity and responsibility of knowing what he was doing. One can say that he was guided by wisdom to find out about his brothers. The important revelation in the Joseph narrative is that responsibility as the main point is linked more to Joseph himself as the principal actor, than to Judah. I will start with Judah and then will discuss Joseph as the principal actor in the importance of growth of being responsible.

In the complication section and the fact that he left his family to another place, Judah's acts seem very different to the Judah that I want to refer to in the importance of the growth of responsibility. However, the maturity came in the way that someone grows in responsibility. During their journey to fetch grain in Egypt, Joseph's brothers found themselves being tried as spies before the vizier of Egypt. Standing up for his brothers, Judah's intervention was focused on two points: first he defended his brothers by pledging that they were the honest people, having the same father. How did Judah defend his family during the detention of Simeon? Secondly, he convinced his father to let Benjamin go with them. Judah offered himself as a pledge (or security) in exchange for Benjamin's safety. Therefore, Judah took responsibility not by sacrificing his children, as Reuben had offered, but by sacrificing his own life: "Send the boy with me. I shall go surety for him, and you may hold me responsible. If I do not bring him back and restore him to you, you can blame me for it all my life" (Gn 43:8-9). Judah's initiative is responsible, because he thought about the consequences if they did not bring their brother back with them. Judah is clearer about his intervention and plays an important role with regards to his brothers. However, Judah's words got through to his father, as he pledges himself, out of tender love for his father so that he does not have a moment's anxiety during their absence. Jacob allows Benjamin to go with them because of the oath Judah made that he would bring Benjamin back to his father. Judah shows more clearly that his position is responsible. One can say that Judah is growing in maturity and responsibility. In the second journey to see the vizier of Egypt, when the cup was found in Benjamin's bag, it is important to mention the attitude of all the brothers towards Benjamin. No one blamed Benjamin for what he did to them by putting them in such a difficult situation. All of them cried against God: "Why?"

Regarding the importance of growing into a responsible person, Judah seems once again to be particularly responsible in this section. He appears to be a different Judah from the one who suggested selling Joseph to the Ishmaelite in the complication (Gn 37), and who was afraid to allow his third son to continue the family seed (Gn 38). In the incident with Benjamin, Judah uses the opportunity to act as a spokesperson for his brothers by revealing point by point everything that happened during their first journey. He does not plead for mercy or forgiveness, nor does he protest that Benjamin is innocent. Judah is serious about his decision, and is empowered to speak by showing the vizier that he is the one who is responsible for his youngest brother, and it is he who will be questioned by his father and will have to answer to him. He captures his attention with this plea: "Please listen, my lord, and let your servant speak a word, I beg" (Gn 44:18). He never thought about what would happen between him and the vizier. It was a responsible decision for him to make, with all the risks that it carried, and also shows his humility: "I beg". He continued arguing to convince the "man" by reminding him that if "our father Jacob will see that the boy is not with us and he will die, and your servants will have brought down our father's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave" (Gn.44:31). Judah was determined to sacrifice himself and be a slave to the vizier in order to save his youngest brother as he had promised. His attitude was praiseworthy, trustworthy and responsible. One can say that Judah spoke in the capacity of a responsible spokesman, simply because of his oath of surety and his fear for his father's life. However, Judah's willingness to offer himself as surety indicates a substantial decision and change. As a skilful orator, he is portrayed in the narrative as genuinely repentant; the one who takes the initiative to sacrifice himself for the favoured younger brother. He was begging the Egyptian lord for grace – he accepted guilt, and thereby also by punishment. The words of Judah are proactive, not reactive. Therefore, Judah's words as a spokesman put an end to Joseph's larger test for his brothers.

As already mentioned concerning Judah, the main point in the importance of growth of being responsible is the focus on Joseph himself. The brothers' attitude to Joseph was hateful and angry and they conspired against Joseph, and they also by covered their tracks in order to deceive their father. Therefore, in terms of growth towards being responsible, the brothers appear to be the most transparent of all the major figures in the story, with Jacob in the middle,

and Joseph as the most opaque. Anyway, Joseph's responsibility seems more clearly defined. Joseph is recognised as the saviour of the whole world, as well as by his family from Canaan. He also emphasised that he wants to let his father know about his high position, as second-in-command of the land of Egypt. Joseph has become personal assistant to Pharaoh, is addressed as a king and stands before Pharaoh to receive his authority as a prophet before God. Joseph's responsibility towards Potiphar's wife reveals his maturity and his sense of responsibility. His responsibility is shown when he orders his brothers to go and fetch his father from Canaan to Egypt, in order to save his father from inevitable starvation. In order to convince his father, he sends for Benjamin. One can say that the importance of growth of being responsible in the Joseph narrative has reached its highest point.

## **2.5 The final situation**

The section focused on the final situation links up with the initial one. Therefore, it focuses on Joseph's relationship with Pharaoh, particularly in terms of their agreement to fetch Joseph's father in Canaan. It deals with Joseph's relationship with his father and his brothers from the preparations to fetch Jacob until Jacob settles in Goshen. Then, it links with up with the overjoyed meeting of Joseph with his father, followed by the great emotion, the weeping and the instructions he gives to his father and brothers about living in Egypt. Finally, Pharaoh's pleasure at meeting the patriarch appears like a "snowball" in order to give shape to the ceremony. It ends with Pharaoh's blessing, Joseph's sons blessing followed with the blessing of all Israel's sons before his last days.

Therefore, Joseph was focused more on his duty, as ordered by Pharaoh. His task was to advance the interests of his master by making him prosper and keeping Egypt alive. Before his family come to Egypt, Joseph's responsibility was focus in preparing for the departure of his father, by giving his brothers advice about not quarrelling on the way (Gn 45:24). After all the great emotion, Joseph's responsibility towards his father focuses more on his life. Jacob's was reassured that his son would bury him in Canaan, which is the common grave of the patriarchs, and this was done as Jacob had asked. An important point here is that Jacob, before his death, let his children, including his grandchildren; know that although they were really prosperous in Egypt, the land in which they would live in the future would be Canaan. In fact, they "have a



high destiny, promised by God which can be fulfilled only in Canaan” (Jacob 1974:322) – therefore, they cannot stay in Egypt forever. One can say that Jacob’s death was glorified in all of Egypt.

In addition, Joseph’s deep relationship with his father in the initial situation is re-established in the final situation. The conclusion of the Joseph narrative now begins to overlap with the conclusion of the Jacob story, and ultimately with the conclusion of the patriarch narratives in general. The rest of the book of Genesis brings together issues that relate to the past and future of the patriarch’s family, now settled in the land of Goshen.

Joseph’s responsibility for managing the entire world of the time is also defined. Since he is elevated to the position of vizier, it is evident that his behaviour and deeds were always pleasing to Pharaoh. Joseph is, in Pharaoh’s view, a straightforward man whom he trusts. Joseph did everything without complaint and therefore the cordial collaboration between Joseph and Pharaoh is evidence of righteousness and honesty, combined with humility and respect for each other. His relationship with all the staff in the court of Pharaoh shows his maturity and responsibility.

To sum up, the final situation seen in the light of the initial situation may be regarded as the parallelism within the narrative. The circumstances that involve Joseph, his brothers and his father in the initial situation, taking into consideration all the aspects of the characters and responsibility, come to be connected in the final situation. Therefore, the final situation can be treated on its own without regard for the initial situation.

### **3 Conclusion**

The Joseph narrative in its entirety appears to be the teaching of responsibility. The importance of growth in being irresponsible revealed in terms of his deep relationship with his father in the initial situation, followed by the misunderstanding between Joseph and his brothers, and shows his immaturity in this phase. One can say that all actions during this period are viewed as irresponsible. Therefore, in the transforming action, Joseph, by virtue of his upbringing, is the kind of man who is skilled in the service he undertakes. From Potiphar’s house to the prison

and then to Pharaoh's court, Joseph's ability and humility are appreciated everywhere. Thus, wisdom is focused on the "fear of God", which was the main source of his skill.

Chapters 7 and 8 of this dissertation confirm and reveal the importance of growth in being responsible so much that one can say that Joseph was transformed and remodelled into a good administrator. In conclusion, I set myself the task to (1) demonstrate that the Joseph narrative is a narrative with a quinary scheme; (2) demonstrate wisdom influence; and (3) demonstrate the development of Joseph's character in this dissertation. Therefore, Joseph is still the model "par excellence" for future administrators.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alcalay, R 1990. *The complete Hebrew English Dictionary*. (New Enlarged Edition) Israel: Massada.
- Allen, R (ed) 2004. *The Penguin dictionary*. London: Penguin Books.
- Alter, R 1981. *The art of biblical narrative*. New York: Basic.
- Arnold, T B 1998. *Encountering the Book of Genesis*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House.
- Audi, R 1999. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: University Press.
- Bowman, J 1976. The fear of the Lord. *OTWSA* 15/16, 9–12.
- Brenner, A 1985. *The Israelite woman: Social role and Literary type in biblical Narrative*. Sheffield: JSOT Press. (Biblical Seminar Series).
- Brueggemann, W 1982. *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*. Atlanta: John Knox.
- Cassuto, U 1973. The story of Judah and Tamar, in Abrahams I (ed) *Biblical and Oriental Studies*, 29–40. Jerusalem: Magnes.
- Coats, G W 1973. Joseph Story and Ancient Wisdom: A Reappraisal. *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 35, 285–297.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1974. Redactional Unity in Genesis 37–50. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 93, 5–21.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1976. *From Canaan to Egypt: Structural and Theological Context for Joseph Story*. Washington: Catholic Biblical Association of America. (Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series 4.)
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1992. s.v. “Joseph, Son of Jacob”. *Anchor Bible Dictionary* 3: 976–981.
- Crenshaw, J L 1969. Method in Determining Wisdom influence upon Historical Literature. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88, 129–142.
- \_\_\_\_\_ (ed) 1976. Prolegomena, in *Studies in Ancient Israelite wisdom*, 1–35. New York: Ktav.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1981. *Old Testament wisdom: An introduction*. London: SCM.
- Culley, R C 1992. *Themes and Variations: A Study of Action in Biblical Narratives*. Atlanta: Scholars.
- Emerton, J A 1979. Wisdom, in Anderson, G W (ed), *Tradition and Interpretation*, 214–235. Oxford: Clarendon.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2001. The Teaching of Amenemope and Proverbs XXII:17–XXIV:20: Further Reflections on a Long–Standing Problem. *Vetus Testamentum* 51, 431–465.

- Fokkelman, J P 1999. *Reading biblical narrative: A Practical Guide*. Leiden: Deo Publishing.  
(Tools for Biblical Study 1.)
- Fretheim, T E 1994. The Book of Genesis, in *The New Interpreter's Bible*, Volume 1, 319–677.  
Nashville: Abingdon.
- Gaster, M 1971. *The Chronicles of Jerahmeel*. New York: Ktav.
- Gibson, J C L 1982. *Genesis*. Daily Study Bible. Vol.2. Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press.
- Green, B 1996. *What Profit for Us? Remembering the Story of Joseph*. Lanham: University Press  
of America.
- Grollenberg, L H 1978. *Rediscovering the Bible*. London: SCM.
- Hamilton, V P 1982. *Handbook on the Pentateuch*. Grand Rapids: Baker House Book.
- \_\_\_\_ 1997. *Genesis*. Macon: Mercer University Press.
- Humphreys, W L 1978, The motif of the Wise Courtier in the book of Proverbs, in Gammie, J  
G, Brueggemann, Humphreys, W L & Ward, J M (eds), *Israelite wisdom: Theological and  
Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrein*, 177–190. New York: Scholars.
- \_\_\_\_ 1988. *Joseph and his Family: A Literary Study*. California: University of South California.
- Hunter, A 2006. *Wisdom literature*. London: SCM Press.
- Jacob, B 1974. *The first Book of the Bible: Genesis*. New York: Ktav.
- Janzen, J.G 1993. *Abraham and All the Families of the Earth: A Commentary of the Book of  
Genesis 12–50*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.
- Kselman, J S 1988. Genesis in Mays J L (ed), *Harper's Bible Commentary*. San Francisco:  
Harper & Row. 85–128.
- Kugel, L J 1994. In *Photiphar's house: The Interpretative Life of Biblical Texts*. Harvard:  
University Press.
- Leibowitz, N 1976. *Studies in Bereshit 'Genesis'*. Translated by A. Newman. Jerusalem: World  
Zionist Organization.
- Licht, J 1978. *Storytelling in the Bible*. Jerusalem: Magnes.
- Loader, J A 1977. Chokma – Joseph – Hybris. *OTWSA 17/18*: 21–31.
- \_\_\_\_ 1986. Texts with a wisdom perspective, in Deist, F E & Vorster, W S (eds), *Words from  
afar*, 108–129. Cape Town: Tafelberg. (The Literature of the Old Testament 1).
- Lockwood, P F 1992. Tamar's place in the Joseph Cycle in *Lutheran Theological Journal* 26.
- Longacre, E R 1989. *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Text*

- linguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39–48*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns.
- Macdonald, J 1956. Joseph in the Qur'an and Muslim Commentary: A comparative Study, in "Muslim world 46" (1956): 113–31, 207–24.
- Mann, T W 1988. *The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch*. Atlanta: John Knox Press.
- Marguerat, D & Bourquin, Y 1999. *How to Read Bible Stories: An introduction to narrative criticism*. London: SCM.
- Marshall, H I, et al (eds), 1996. *New Bible Dictionary* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed), Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press.
- Menn, E M 1997. *Judah and Tamar (Genesis 38) in Ancient Jewish Exegesis: Studies in Literary Form and Hermeneutic*. Leiden: Brill. (Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism).
- Moberly, R W L 1992. *Genesis 12–50*. Sheffield: JSOT. (Old Testament Guides.)
- Murphy, R E 1990. *The tree of life: an exploration of biblical wisdom literature*. New York: Doubleday.
- Pearsall, J (ed.) 1999. *The concise Oxford dictionary*, (10<sup>th</sup> ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Plaut, G 1981. Genesis in Plaut, G *The Torah: A Modern Commentary*. New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations.
- Procher, P (ed) 1995. *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Redford, D B 1970. *A Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph (Genesis 37–50)*. Leiden: Brill.
- Revised English Bible with the Apocrypha* 1989. Oxford: University Press.
- Ryrie, C C 1995. *Ryrie Study Bible: Expanded edition*. Chicago: Moody Press.
- Sailhamer, J H 1990. 'Genesis' in Sailhamer, J H (ed), *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*. Volume 2, 1–284. Grand Rapids: Zondervan.
- Sarna, N M 1989. *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society.
- Simpson, J A & Weiner, ESC (eds) 1989. *The Oxford English dictionary*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). 13,742. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Skinner, J 1994. *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary of Genesis*, (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). Edinburgh: T&T Clark.
- Soanes, C & Stevenson A 2006. *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (11<sup>th</sup> ed). Oxford:

- University Press.
- Speiser, E A 1964. *Genesis*. New York: Doubleday (Anchor Bible).
- Vergote, J 1959. *Joseph en Egypte: Genèse Chap. 37–50: a la lumière des études Egyptologiques recentes*. Louvain: Publication Universitaire.
- Von Rad, G 1966. The Joseph narrative and Ancient Wisdom, in Von Rad *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, 292–300. London: Oliver & Boyd.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1972. *Genesis: A Commentary*. London: SCM.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1984. The theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation. In Von Rad *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays*, 13 – 43. London: SCM.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2005. *From Genesis to Chronicles: Exploration in Old Testament Theology*. Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Wehmeier, Sally & Ashby, (eds). 2000. *Oxford advanced learners dictionary of current English*, (6<sup>th</sup> ed). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Wenham, J 1994. *Genesis 16–50*. Dallas: Word
- Wessels, J P H 1984. The Joseph story as a wisdom novelette, *Old Testament Essays* 2, 39–60. Pretoria: UNISA.
- West, S A 1984. Judah and Tamar: A Scriptural Enigma, *Dor le dor*(12, 246–252).
- Westermann, C 1986. *Genesis 37 – 50: A Commentary*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1996. *Joseph: Eleven Bible Studies on Genesis*: Minneapolis: Fortress Press.
- Whybray, R N 1974. *The intellectual Tradition in the Old Testament*. New York: De Gruyter.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 1987. Joseph Story and Pentateuchal Criticism in Whybray, R N (ed) *The Making of the Pentateuch: A Methodology Study*. Sheffield: JSOT Press.
- Wildavsky, A 1993. *Assimilation versus Separation: Joseph the Administrator and the Politics of Religion in Biblical Israel*. New Brunswick: Transaction.
- Wilson, L 2004. *Joseph Wise and Otherwise: The Intersections of Wisdom and Covenant in Genesis 37–50*. Carlisle: Paternoster Press.

## QUOTATION TO CHECK

1. And, the situation in Dothan Joseph has changed from the subject into the object, and it is no coincidence that we do not hear another word from his mouth” (Fokkelman 1999:79). P.9
2. this “unit reveals itself as a story within a story, a story with its own independent structure, genre and intention” (Coats 1992:977). P.10
3. “there is an intimate connection between wisdom and a proper fear (that is, awe or respect) before God” (Hunter 2006:21). P.18
4. Westermann (1986:100) specifies that  
... the significance of the wisdom as an integral part of the Bible resides above all in the fact that it makes it clear that the creator gave man the capacity of becoming properly oriented in his world, of understanding himself in his world, and of mastering the daily tasks given him. P.19
5. So “the hatred of those who have been slighted is targeted far more vehemently against the favored one than it is against the one who does the favoring, even when the favored one should not be blamed” (Westermann 1996:11). P.35
6. Westermann (1996:4-5) argues that, “while we might see this favouritism as an injustice, the old Israelites would reply that no one can love two children equally”. P.39
7. “callously sit and eat their meal” (Von Rad 1972:354; Kselmann 1988:113), p.46
8. Westermann (1987:324–325) states that the contexts in which the Ishmaelites and Midianites are mentioned are hardly in accord with at least the literal sense of the representation, according to which both would be Joseph’s cousins if the context refers to Genesis 21 and 24:2. Another element to which to turn our attention is that the “Midianite traders, passing by, kidnap Joseph, and carry him away into Egypt”. P.47
9. “his determination to look for his brothers in the fields (Gn 37:15) and go on to Dothan, shows that Joseph is determined to meet his father’s intention, not merely his command” (Licht 1978:48). P.53
10. The effect of Judah being exposed in Genesis 38 is that the righteousness of Tamar is revealed to all (Humphreys 1988:37–38). P. 68
11. When Jacob first hears this news from them “he was stunned; he could not believe them” (Jacob 1974:97). It appears that the “lie with which the brothers concealed their guilt had, after all a further effect” (Jacob 1974:98). P.129
12. From this point on, as **Jacob (1974:98)** argues, the narrator wishes to show that the father’s lament in the beginning (Gn 37:34f) has been stilled. “His approach to death is transformed. Now he will not be brought down with sorrow to Sheol, but he will see his child and thereby experience the integrity of his life cycle, so that he can die in peace.” P.129

